

Guidelines for Prospective Applicants for Research & Development funding from the Scottish Aquaculture Research Forum (SARF)

What is SARF!

The Scottish Aquaculture Research Forum (SARF) is an independent company whose main aim is to support research into aquaculture and related areas.

The Strategic Framework for Scottish Aquaculture was published by the Scottish Executive in March 2003. The document outlined a vision of an aquaculture industry guided by the principles of sustainable development, balancing economic progress with social justice and environmental responsibility. The formation of the Scottish Aquaculture Research Forum was one of 33 priorities for action contained within the framework and was created to promote, encourage and support research and development in aquaculture. Accordingly, SARF was formed in April 2004 as an independent company limited by guarantee with charitable status. The Objectives of SARF are:

- To promote, encourage and support scientific research and development in aquaculture and related areas. This includes research in the fields of environmental impacts, technical and biological cultivation and health and welfare science.
- To enhance public understanding of aquaculture through the dissemination of research results in the public domain. This will include research exhibitions and on-line publications of investigations and results.
- SARF has a range of members including representatives from the aquaculture industry, government organisations, wild fish groups and environmental NGO's. The research undertaken will be across a broad range of areas and will be required to meet the collective needs of its members.

SARF Research and Development Priorities

SARF Does not accept unsolicited applications. The Directors of SARF are drawn from a broad range of organisations with interests in the sustainable development of aquaculture. In consultation with their parent bodies, the Directors submit priority areas for research which may be funded by SARF. These priorities are further refined with reference to the relevance to objectives of SARF, available budget, degree of urgency, scope for securing additional funding, timescale etc. Some priority areas may be specified in detail to fulfil a defined research requirement others may be identified on a more general basis.

Calls for Proposals

At present, SARF issues calls for proposals on an *ad hoc* basis. Calls will usually be published on the SARF website (<http://www.sarf.org.uk>), together with the websites of its members, Defra and the major Research Councils as appropriate.

As a matter of principle, applicants will be given a minimum of six weeks from the date of publication of the call to submit their applications. Where appropriate, longer application timescales will be used. A date by which applicants should expect a formal response to their application will be stated at the time of publication.

Copies of all the forms used in the application and appraisal processes are available on the SARF website.

Application Forms

Application forms derived from those currently in use by the Research Councils, Defra and now Seafish have been used to create a SARF Research Application form. The form has been designed to facilitate application to multiple Sponsors and to provide the necessary information to allow structured appraisal and, for successful projects, ease of contract. These forms can be completed and submitted electronically although a signed hard copy will be required for contractual purposes.

In addition, the forms refer to the “The Joint Code of Practice for Research”, as developed by a working group of representatives from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC). It has subsequently been endorsed by The Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, The Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department and the Welsh Assembly Government Agriculture and Rural Affairs Department (The UK Devolved Administrations). The Code applies to all research funded by DEFRA, the FSA and the UK Devolved Administrations and to research funded by BBSRC and NERC in their own Institutes. It is intended to apply to all types of research, but the overriding principle is fitness of purpose and therefore the individual provisions should be interpreted with that in mind. Ensuring that applicants abide by the principles set out in the Code of Practice will add quality assurance for SARF and offer parity with other sponsors of research.

Appraisal Process

Under normal circumstances, a two stage appraisal process will operate, with the provision for more streamlined rapid appraisal for some small projects. Proposals submitted by the allotted closing date for any given call are sent out for external peer review to at least two referees. In addition, depending upon the number of proposals received, at least two SARF Directors are requested to formally review each proposal. Directors who may, or may be perceived to have, a vested interest in a specific proposal, are excluded from the appraisal process.

The results of the appraisals are collated and circulated to Directors as a ranked list together with referee’s comments. As appropriate, a meeting of the Directors is arranged to formally discuss the proposals and reach agreement on the projects to be funded.

Confidentiality Agreement

Before SARF Directors and external referees have sight of proposals they are required to sign a Confidentiality Agreement.

Appraisal Forms

SARF Appraisal forms have been designed to facilitate structured assessment of proposals, resulting in a numerical output in addition to comments and a summary grade for each proposal. This information allows competing proposals to be ranked and provide a defensible structure to SARF deliberations on the relative merits of proposals.

Weighting of appraisal scores

An agreed percentage weighting is applied to encourage the submission of projects with additional sponsorship. Whilst this approach does not preclude sole sponsorship by SARF, there is an emphasis on applicants to secure additional support for their projects from sponsors other than SARF and to declare any auditable resources (in-kind) which may be contributed to projects.

The SARF Secretariat will endeavour to provide feedback to all applicants within 14 working days of the Board’s decision.

Contractual Process

A draft SARF contract is available upon request from the Secretariat. Contractual negotiations will be conducted between the Secretariat and a single designated person for each project. It is the responsibility of this individual to communicate with members of the project team. Should contractual negotiations become protracted as a result of delays attributable to the applicant, SARF reserves the right to withdraw from the contractual process.

Depending upon the nature of the project, SARF may insist upon the provision of a Collaboration and Intellectual Property Rights Agreement being in place before the project commences.

Payments

SARF will make payments quarterly in arrears in response to invoices from the designated project lead organisation. Disbursement of funds to project partners and subcontractors will be the responsibility of the project lead organisation. Payment will be made within 30 days of receipt of an acceptable invoice with 10% of the final payment being retained by SARF until the project final report has been approved by the Chairman. Subject to the details of the contract, SARF reserves the right to terminate payment and seek repayment of funds where, in the view of the Board and subject to legal advice, a contractor is in breach of contract. SARF may from time to time require audit of project expenditure and it is the responsibility of the contractor to ensure that adequate financial records are maintained.

Project Reporting and Monitoring

All SARF projects will be subject to specified reporting and monitoring procedures. This process will include the provision of interim and annual written reports in a prescribed format, together with the option of an annual project monitoring meeting with at least one SARF representative.

Project reports and monitoring reports will be circulated to SARF Directors for comment and returned to the project team for feedback.

All projects will be required to submit a final report and each project will be allocated a final grade which may be published and shared with other grant awarding bodies as appropriate.

Funding Modes

Small Grants – Up to £10,000. Designed for small short duration studies, including seed corn and exploratory work that might lead on to more substantive projects.

Research Grants – Open format, but SARF may recommend maximum sums, timescales, percentage contributions and a specified weighting (see above).

Type of Procurement

For each of the funding modes there are three forms of procurement:

I. Open Competition – (defined or undefined subject area)

II. Invited Tender – (defined subject area) through:

- 1) Multiple Tender Action
- 2) Single Tender Action

III. Co-sponsorship

Projects submitted to SARF which fit with SARF R&D priorities and **already have agreed funding** on the condition of approval of additional support from SARF.

For **Open Competition**, a fixed date call for proposals will be published.

For **Multiple and Single Tender Actions**, a strict protocol is applied. The selection of tendering organisations will be agreed by the Directors or a designated subgroup. The reasons for adopting the Single Tender Action mode of funding will be stated explicitly in a document that accompanies the application and the document must be signed by both the Company Chairman and the SARF Secretariat, before a contract is approved.

All invited tender applications will be required to be submitted by a specified time and date. Applications will need to be sealed in two envelopes with the outer envelope bearing a specified identification code referring to the tender. The tender envelopes will be opened and recorded with at least two members of the Secretariat present as witnesses.

Many sponsoring organisations (SARF included) require or encourage **Co-sponsorship** of projects. To facilitate this process, SARF may accept proposals that clearly fit with SARF's R&D priorities and

already have the agreed support of another sponsor, but who's support is contingent upon the project securing the balance of funding from other sources. SARF may insist on strict limits of time attached to any offer of support to such projects to prevent funds being unspent for significant periods.

Questions related to these Guidelines

Any questions related to these Guidelines or the operation of SARF should be directed to the Secretariat:

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