



Environmental Protection Agency
An Gníomhaireacht um Chaomhnú Comhshaoil



EPA Research Programme 2021-2030

Fast-track to Policy Funding: Supporting policy and legislation development in soil health and soil quality

October 2021

EPA Research Fast-track to Policy Funding

This document provides the Technical Description for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Fast-track to Policy Funding towards supporting policy and legislation development in soil health and soil quality.

Applicants should read the following carefully and consult the other documentation provided (e.g. 2021 EPA Research Fast-track to Policy Funding Guidelines and Terms & Conditions).

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Introduction

EPA Research 2030¹ is the ten-year high-level framework for the EPA's research programme (2021-2030), designed to be agile, responsive and flexible.

Environmental policies must be underpinned by an in-depth level of knowledge that needs to be delivered through a systematic programme of environmental research and assessment. Research can play an important role by generating evidence that will support the design and implementation of effective and robust policy, evaluate its outcomes, and demonstrate its value. EPA Research 2030 will further our understanding of our environmental and natural systems. It will enable the outcomes from research to be put in action to protect and improve our natural and built environment.

Fast-track to Policy Funding

Fast-Track to Policy funding aims to provide evidence synthesis, review of policies and best practices to answer urgent emerging policy questions (addressing emerging short-term policy needs). This funding will be provided as short-term evidence-based research studies.

Fast-track to Policy Funding	
Type of Project	Short-term evidence-based research study
Indicative Timeline	From 2 weeks to 9 months
Indicative Budget	from € 5,000 to € 50,000
Outputs	Short Summary Evidence Report, published by the EPA, and any other specific deliverables included in the topic description

Application Process

Making an Application

Applications **must** be made online at <https://epa.smartsimple.ie>

You will also need to refer to the following documentation, which is available to download from the EPA's Online Grant Management and Application Portal or from the EPA website²:

1. 2021 Fast-track to Policy Funding Guidelines and Terms & Conditions; and
2. EPA Online Grant Management and Application Portal System User Guides.

¹ <https://www.epa.ie/our-services/research/epa-research-2030/>

² <http://www.epa.ie/our-services/research/>

IMPORTANT

Please refer carefully to the Technical Description Document and ensure that you choose the correct Call Topic Reference when creating your application on the EPA's Grant Management and Application Portal as **mistakes will not be rectified**.

For all co-funded topics, **researchers may not apply for or participate in projects that are to be co-funded by their organisation, even if their organisation would not be in receipt of funding.**

Deadlines

It is the responsibility of the Applicant to ensure that proposals are submitted before the call deadline, and the responsibility of the relevant Research Proposal Authoriser (i.e. Research Offices/Managing Directors for companies) to ensure that proposals are authorised before the organisational approval deadline. Deadlines are absolute and are enforced by the system automatically. Discussion WILL NOT be entered into in the case of late submissions and/or approvals, how-so ever caused. The EPA's decision in this matter will be FINAL.

FAILURE TO MEET EITHER OF THE DEADLINES OUTLINED MEANS THAT YOUR PROPOSAL WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED FOR FUNDING.

Eligibility Criteria

- Proposals that exceed the maximum duration and/or request funding in excess of the maximum specified in the Technical Description for the call topic will be deemed invalid and will not proceed to the evaluation stage.
- Proposals which do not use the correct templates will be deemed invalid and will not proceed to the evaluation stage.
- Proposals which do not address the scope of the call topic under which they are submitted, will be deemed invalid and will not proceed to the evaluation stage.
- Applications for funding will only be considered where the lead applicant organisation is a Higher Education or other Research Institution located³ on the island of Ireland.
- Applicants must be available to start as per the date indicated in the Call Contents "Latest Start Date".

All research proposals must build on findings and recommendations from past and current research⁴ projects (where relevant).

Open Access and Open Data

All projects must comply with the EPA's Open Access Policy available from: <http://www.epa.ie/our-services/research/epa-research-2030/strategies-and-policies/open-access-policy/>

³ For the avoidance of doubt an applicant organisation is considered to be located on the island of Ireland where it has an established legal presence here and is registered for all relevant employee and corporate taxes in the respective jurisdictions of either Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland.

⁴ Including EPA-funded, other Irish and EU and international research projects and initiatives/activities.

Call Content

Topic Title	Identifying gaps in soil and soil health knowledge in Ireland to support policy and legislation development		
Call Topic Reference	Protecting and Restoring Our Natural Environment 2021 Call Topic 7		
Project Type	Short-term Evidence-based Research Studies		
Maximum Budget	€ 30,000	Maximum Duration	4 months
Latest Start Date	29 th November 2021		
Co-funded by: Geological Survey Ireland	 Geological Survey Suirbhéireacht Gheolaiochta Ireland Éireann		

Policy Need

The EU Soil Strategy is currently being developed as part of the EU Green Deal and is expected to be finalised by March 2022. Its aims are to: protect soil fertility, reduce erosion and sealing, increase organic matter, identify contaminated sites, restore degraded soils and define what constitutes ‘good ecological status’ for soils. The EU Roadmap New Soil Strategy - healthy soil for a healthy life⁵, due for adoption in 2021, acknowledges the multiple functions of soil which are considered essential to achieving the objectives of the European Green Deal, such as climate neutrality, biodiversity restoration, zero pollution ambition for a toxic-free environment, healthy and sustainable food systems and a resilient environment.

At national level, there is a commitment in the Programme for Government 2020 to publish a National Soils Strategy. The forthcoming EU Soil Strategy has the potential to lead to the development of a comprehensive legislative framework for soil in Ireland. In developing a national soil policy, Ireland needs to ensure that the competing needs for soil are optimised, and that good soil health is maintained for all future generations.

The findings from past research can help inform the development of EU legislation on soil but only if it is properly analysed and the knowledge and evidence efficiently transferred to policy makers. The findings should also inform policy development and identify gaps in soil and soil health knowledge in Ireland. Therefore, there is a need for an Evidence Review to inform the potential development of EU legislative measures on soil, as well as the development of a national soil policy; and to identify knowledge gaps.

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12634-Healthy-soils-new-EU-soil-strategy_en

Scope

Proposals are invited to:

- Identify relevant national⁶ and international⁷ research on soil health and soil quality on the Island of Ireland (including those relating to carbon sequestration and with similar soils to Ireland). Emphasis should be on the most relevant and recent publications and scientific outputs (i.e. within the last eight years).
- Based on their findings, provide clear recommendations to inform policy development in soil and soil health on the Island of Ireland.
- Identify knowledge gaps and evidence needs to inform priority research areas on soil health and soil quality supporting policy development in Ireland.

This study should not be limited to agricultural usage (some 33% of land uses in Ireland are non-agricultural, including urban, where 63% of the population lives). Findings and recommendations could be categorised using themes aligned with the EC Soil Health and Food Mission⁸ in the context of both agricultural and non-agricultural aspects, and in any event should include:

1. Land degradation;
2. Organic carbon stocks, in particular soil carbon loss;
3. Compaction, Soil sealing and reuse of urban soil;
4. Pollution and restoration;
5. Erosion;
6. Soil structure;
7. Soil literacy;
8. Biodiversity loss; and
9. Salinisation.

Expected Outputs

The outputs from this project include:

- An EPA Evidence Synthesis Report. This report should be written in concise (maximum 30 pages), non-technical, and accessible English and be tailored for non-academics and policy makers.
- A full list of references/bibliography of the existing research outputs (published and unpublished, reports, best practice documents, technical reviews etc.) categorised using themes aligned with the EC Soil Health and Food Mission.

It is expected that monthly update meetings will be held.

Please consult the 2021 Fast-track to Policy Funding Guidelines and Terms & Conditions for the full list of expected outputs and interim/final reporting requirements.

⁶ including but not limited to research carried out by or funded by EPA, Teagasc and Geological Survey Ireland.

⁷ including international papers (looking at countries with similar soil to Ireland) can be considered where relevant and necessary to help identify priority research for Ireland.

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/caring-soil-caring-life_en

Indicative Timeframe

Thursday 21 st October 2021 at 11:00 GMT	Call opening
Thursday 28 th October 2021 at 17:00 GMT	Deadline for queries relating to the technical contents of this call
Thursday 4 th November 2021 at 17:00 GMT	Submission deadline
Monday 8 th November 2021 at 17:00 GMT	Approval deadline
Latest start date: 29 th November 2021	Start of successful project

Further Information

Information on current research projects being supported by the programme is available in the Research section of the EPA website: <http://www.epa.ie/our-services/research/>.

The following additional documents are available from the EPA website:

<http://www.epa.ie/publications/research/current-call-documents/>

- 2021 Fast-track to Policy Funding Guidelines and Terms & Conditions.
- EPA Research Programme 2021 – 2030 – Communicating Research.

Other relevant EPA Research Programme Strategies and Policies are also available from the EPA website: <http://www.epa.ie/our-services/research/epa-research-2030/strategies-and-policies/>.

For updates on the EPA Research Call 2021:

1. Subscribe to [EPA Research Newsletters](#)
2. Follow us on Twitter [@EPAResearchNews](#)
3. Visit the [EPA Funding web pages](#)
4. Check the [Research Call Frequently Asked Questions web page](#)

Any queries that are not covered in the call documentation or on the FAQs webpage must be submitted to research@epa.ie.