

# Information for applicants for the funding announcement for the establishment of Centres of Excellence (SFF III)

## 1. Introduction

This document, together with the call for proposals and the document “The Centres of Excellence Scheme (SFF) – Requirements and Guidelines” (Research Council of Norway, 28 February 2011), provides comprehensive information about the SFF scheme and sets out the requirements to be met by the applicants.

## 2. Background

Several subject-specific evaluations conducted in the late 1990s commented on the lack of long-term, stable funding for and strategic thinking in Norwegian research. These findings formed an important part of the foundation for efforts to promote increased quality in Norwegian research. The government white paper on research from 1998-1999, *Forskning ved et veiskille* (“Research at a crossroads”), called for the establishment of a Centres of Excellence (SFF) scheme, and the Research Council was asked to compile a report outlining the framework for such a scheme.<sup>1</sup> Following a dialogue with the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs, the first funding announcement for the scheme was issued in 2001 with funding provided by the Fund for Research and Innovation (established in 1999). Thirteen centres were given SFF status at the end of 2002/beginning of 2003. A second funding announcement was issued in 2005, and eight new centres were established in 2007.

The government white paper “Climate for Research” (2008-2009) gives the SFF scheme a positive review and indicates that the scheme will be continued. As a follow-up to the white paper, the Research Council conducted an evaluation of the scheme as a funding instrument in 2010.<sup>2</sup> On the basis of this evaluation and the course indicated in the white paper, the Research Council of Norway decided to issue another funding announcement for the conferral of SFF status in 2011.

## 3. The SFF scheme

### 3.1 Objectives and main criteria

The SFF scheme is the Research Council’s foremost funding instrument for promoting quality in Norwegian research. Establishing centres with generous, long-term financing gives the institutions an opportunity to restructure their research community and develop new collaborative relationships to enhance their position on the international research front. Important secondary objectives of the scheme are to strengthen researcher recruitment and expand international cooperation.

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<sup>1</sup> *Sentre for fremragende forskning. Utredning av en norsk ordning* (“Centres of Excellence: A report on a Norwegian scheme”), (Research Council of Norway, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> “Evaluation of Added Value and Financial Aspects”, (Research Council of Norway, 2010).

A high level of scientific merit in relation to international standards is the main criterion used to assess and prioritise the grant proposals. This criterion applies to the planned research activity as well as to the centre's key scientific staff.

The SFF scheme puts special emphasis on a long-term perspective. While ordinary grants are usually awarded for a three-year period, centres awarded SFF status may receive funding for up to 10 years. The "Requirements and Guidelines" document, which describes the SFF scheme, states explicitly that funding for the scheme is limited to a maximum of two consecutive five-year periods. A mid-term evaluation conducted roughly three and a half years after a centre's start-up serves as the basis for the Research Council's decision regarding whether to continue the individual centre for the remainder of the total ten-year period or to terminate the centre's activities after five years. It has also been stated explicitly (both in the description of the scheme and in numerous dialogue meetings with the centres and the leadership at the institutions) that from the time of termination of activity, be it at five or ten years, funding from the Research Council will cease and the centre will no longer be part of the SFI scheme. The current framework for the scheme is provided in the document "The Centres of Excellence Scheme (SFF) – Requirements and Guidelines" (Research Council of Norway, 28 February 2011).

### **3.2 Other main features of the scheme**

SFF host institutions may be universities (including university hospitals), university colleges and independent research institutes that have the resources needed to fulfil the requirements set out for the SFF scheme. The centres are expected to contribute to the renewal of research and not merely continue the activities of an established centre, although no specific institution will be prevented from submitting a proposal in a new funding round.

Since the competition will be keen, and the design and assessment of the grant applications will tie up considerable resources in the research communities as well as at the Research Council, the host institutions are specifically requested to limit the number of applications submitted. If an institution submits more than one application, it should not rank them in order of priority.

Applicants should point out the value added inherent in organising the research activity in the form of a centre. When assessing a centre's plans, greater importance will be attached to the potential to conduct innovative, scientific activities than to the previous scholarly production of key scientific personnel.

As a general rule, the centres are to consist of research groups which, to the extent possible, are located at the same site and are affiliated with dynamic scientific networks. Under certain circumstances, virtual centres will also be allowed. The phrase "located at the same site" is understood to mean collaboration between research groups or individual researchers who work in the same building complex.

It is expected that a strong leadership will be established for the centres under the scheme, and that they will exercise a high degree of autonomy in relation to the host institution, both from a scientific and an organisational perspective.

The SFF scheme is based on the principle that the Research Council will provide funding from the Fund for Research and Innovation to cover the basic funding of the centres' expenses

related to personnel, operations, necessary equipment and administrative services. The host institution is expected to contribute its own funding to the centre. However, a flexible approach will be taken when the size and nature of the contribution are stipulated. The host institution's contribution may consist of infrastructure that it places at the disposal of the centre, allocations from its own budget or other resources that the host institution obtains from its own or external sources.

It is crucial that the planning of how SFF investments will be safeguarded in the long term begins as early as possible. The host institutions are therefore asked to describe in the grant application how they intend to accomplish this. Their explanation will be included in the material considered in the assessment process.

The tentative budget framework for an individual centre's grant application is an average of NOK 8-20 million per year. Applicants must incorporate salary and price increases into their funding plans, as the Research Council will not adjust the framework allocation for inflation during the funding period for the centre.

A funding announcement for the SFF scheme is planned to be issued every five years.

### **3.3 Special guidelines related to gender equality**

To improve the gender balance under the SFF scheme, grant applications must include specific objectives related to gender equality perspectives, especially with a view to recruitment.

Research institutions are asked to give consideration to gender equality issues when planning and preparing their new SFF applications. In particular, the institutions are asked to encourage the research communities to nominate women as centre directors and senior researchers. When assessing grant applications, and assuming that all other factors related to scientific merit are equal, the Research Council will give priority in the assessment process to applications with female centre directors and to centres with a high percentage of women in leadership positions.

The institutions are asked to describe their gender equality objectives in their SFF applications and to provide target figures for the percentage of women among researchers and doctoral and post-doctoral research fellows at the centres. This description, along with the results achieved by the centres, will be a factor in the mid-term evaluation of the centres awarded status and funding as SFF centres.

## **4. Grant applications**

The application process will be conducted in two stages. First, a prequalification round will be held. Thereafter a limited number of applicants will be invited to submit final applications with all the requisite information.

Applications for SFF centre status are to be submitted online via the eSøknad electronic submission system using the application type "Other institutional support". Please refer to the application guidelines and information provided in the eSøknad system. Applications will only be made accessible to individuals who have signed a declaration of confidentiality. Applications must satisfy the following requirements:

- Applications (including all attachments) must be submitted in English.
- The project description is not to exceed 15 pages, including the list of references (see Section 4.2).
- Funding plan: the centre's budget provided in the final application must be based on concrete, realistic assumptions.
- Partners: confirmation of the partners' scientific and financial participation in the centre must be attached to the final application.
- Research fellowships/positions: a list of the centre's staff members with the probable position categories and numbers must be attached to the final application. It is not necessary to provide personal data for staff other than the centre's director and other senior researchers.

#### 4.1 The application form

Attachment 1 to this document provides additional information for completing the application form and requirements for applications for SFF status to supplement the guidelines integrated into the application form in the eSøknad system.

#### 4.2 The project description

The project description is not to exceed 15 pages including the list of references. The standard page format is A4, with 2 cm margins and a 12-point font in Times New Roman. As a general rule, pages in excess of this will not be submitted for assessment.

The project description must include the following points:

**Status:** National and international state-of-the-art of the relevant technologies and research topics for the centre.

**Research methodology:** Describe the methodology and theories planned used, and explain why they are suitable for generating relevant knowledge in the field and promoting future value creation. Describe plans for publication in scientific peer-reviewed journals as well as plans for conferences and any patents.

**Research tasks:** Identify and describe the research questions that will be examined. Define key research tasks and research-related targets and explain their significance.

**Researcher training and recruitment:** Describe plans for researcher recruitment. If the host institution is a research institute, a university or university college with the right to confer doctoral degrees must be a partner in the centre. Specify the name(s) of the educational institution(s). Specify the number of doctoral degrees planned within which research areas. Specify the planned number of female PhD scholarships.

**Value added created by establishment of the centre:** Describe the value added generated by establishing an SFF centre in the field in question. Describe the research to be conducted, the research groups that will participate, the researcher training provided and the host institution (and the other partners, if any). Also describe any vision for the centre's role in the national research system (see Attachment 2 "Application assessment criteria").

**Organisation:** Describe how the cooperation at the centre will be organised and why this structure has been chosen. What is the role of each partner in the implementation of the centre's activities, and what type of knowledge/expertise will the partners contribute? Describe how the centre's activities will be managed and how the involvement of all partners will be ensured. In terms of location, decentralised solutions will be possible. If a decentralised model is chosen, applicants are required to describe interaction at the centre as well as plans for researcher exchange between the host institution and the partners.

**International cooperation:** Describe plans for international cooperation at the centre. Describe the international research cooperation efforts in which the centre will participate. How will such cooperation benefit the centre? Explain why the centre will be an attractive partner for cooperation with international research players.

**Gender equality:** Describe how gender equality considerations will be incorporated into the centre's activities as well as plans for increasing the recruitment of women. Provide a target figure for the percentage of female research fellows.

**Phasing-out strategy:** Describe how the institution intends to safeguard the SFF investment in the long term, including after the cessation of the Research Council's funding of the centre.

**Progress plan with milestones:** The plan should provide a timeline for and describe the main activities and milestones, including project deliverables associated with the given milestones.

**Funding sources:** State which funding sources other than the SFF grant from the Research Council will likely be used to finance the centre.

**Ethical perspectives:** Describe any ethical problems related to the research activity or the utilisation of the results produced by the centre. Please refer to the guidelines on research ethics drawn up by the national committees on research ethics and the Norwegian Act on Ethics and Integrity in Research.

**Environmental impact:** Describe whether and how the research conducted by the centre or the use of the results will have environmental impacts of significance (positive or negative).

## 5. Application assessment process

### 5.1 Assessment criteria

Scientific merit will be the main criterion used to assess the applications, both in the prequalification round and in the final application round. The assessment will be given in the form of a verbal description on a scale ranging from 1 to 7, in which the points correspond to the following result:

- 1: Poor
- 2: Weak
- 3: Fair
- 4: Good
- 5: Very good
- 6: Excellent
- 7: Exceptional

The overall assessment of scientific merit will be based on the following individual criteria, which are listed in relation to the relevant application type:

- Scientific merit
- The project manager and project group (centre director and steering group)
- Feasibility
- International cooperation
- National cooperation
- Value added generated by establishing the centre
- Dissemination and communication of results

In addition to scientific merit, the following factors will also be taken into account when assessing the grant applications:

- Relevance relative to the call for proposals
- Ethical perspectives
- Environmental impact (if relevant)
- Recruitment of women
- Gender balance in the project
- Internationalisation

Please see Attachment 2 for a detailed description of the individual criteria.

## **5.2 Procedure for assessing grant applications**

*Prequalification:* Grant applications for both the prequalification and the final application round will be assessed by a virtual panel comprised of at least three international referees who together will prepare a joint statement. Applicants may propose the names of referees whom they consider to be qualified to assess the application (see the application form). The statement will be sent to the applicant, who may choose to comment on it. If comments are made, the referees will have the opportunity to revise their original statement.

Three international expert committees (natural science/technology, bioscience, and humanities/social science) consisting of four to five members will be appointed. The main task of these committees will be to select five to 10 applications which they believe should advance to the final round. The committees will base their decision on the application material, the statement of the referee panel and any comments by the applicant. The Executive Board of the Research Council is responsible for taking the final decision regarding which applicants will advance to the final round.

*Final selection:* The three international referees on the virtual panel will assess each application. (The virtual panel will preferably consist of the same referees as those used in the prequalification round.) A joint international scientific committee will be established which will be comprised of seven to 10 members chosen from the three expert committees used in the prequalification round. The joint international scientific committee will rank all of the applications that advanced to the final round on the basis of the final application, the statement of the referee panel, interviews with those nominated as centre directors and the committee's own assessment. The prioritised list of applications will be submitted to the Research Council for a final decision on the award of SFF funding and status. The final decision-making authority rests with the Executive Board.

## 6. Timeline for the enlargement of the SFF scheme

The following timeline has been set up for the enlargement of the SFF scheme:

Call for proposals	1 March 2011
Application deadline for the prequalification round	8 June 2011
Outcome of the prequalification round announced	November 2011
Application deadline for the final round	February 2012
Final decision on conferral of SFF status announced	September 2012
Start-up of the centres	From January 2013

## **Attachment 1 - Guidelines for completing the application form (in the eSøknad electronic submission system)**

SFF applications are to be submitted to the Research Council using the eSøknad electronic submission service. Open the electronic application form by clicking on “Create new application” (or “Open existing application” if you have already created an application) on the call for proposals webpage at <http://www.forskningsradet.no>.

The application type used to apply for SFF funding and status is called “Other institutional support”. This type of application is relatively general, and some of the help texts on the application form require further explanation. The following guidelines are intended to explain and clarify the elements in the help texts on the application form of the application that are not adequately adapted to the SFF scheme. See the “Guidelines” on the application form.

The help texts that are not addressed below apply as described in the application form. The headings below indicate which item of the application form the explanations are associated with.

### **APPLICANT**

#### **Project Owner**

Applications for SFF status must be submitted by the institution that will serve as the host institution for the centre and will be legally accountable for the project.

#### **Project administrator**

Enter the name of the individual authorised to represent and assume obligations (sign) on behalf of the institution. Please note that for SFF applications this should be the person in charge of the institution (rector, managing director etc.).

#### **Project manager**

Enter the name of the director of the centre, who must be one of the prominent researchers responsible for the centre attaining SFF status. Please refer to the “Requirements and Guidelines” regarding the rules for changing the centre’s director.

### **PROJECT INFO**

#### **Project title**

Enter the name of the proposed SFF centre.

#### **Primary and secondary objectives of the project**

Specify the primary and secondary objectives as set out in the project description for the centre.

#### **Project summary**

Provide a brief summary of the project description.

### **FUNDING SCHEME**

#### **Supplementary info from applicant**

#### **Other relevant programmes/activities**

In cases when it is deemed relevant, information may be provided in this box when the SFF



application is associated with other applications for funding from the Research Council or with activities already receiving funding from the Research Council.

## **PROGRESS PLAN**

### **Main activities and milestones in the project period**

Specify only the main activities and milestones based on the project description. The progress plan must cover the entire 10-year period, but should focus on the activities in the first five years. A more detailed progress plan should be included in the project description.

### **Dissemination of project results**

The application for both the prequalification round and the final round is to include a brief description of how the results from the project will be disseminated.

## **BUDGET**

### **Cost plan**

The cost plan must correspond to the progress plan for the centre's scientific activities, as listed in the "progress plan" section of the application form and the project description, and must specify the overall cost of implementing the SFF project, not merely the expenses for which funding is being sought from the Research Council. The cost plan must specify payroll and indirect expenses, procurement of R&D services, equipment and other operating costs. The costs for the second five-year period must be totalled and entered in the column to the right of the first five-year period.

### **Cost codes**

This section is used to indicate the sector in which expenses are incurred.

### **Funding plan**

The funding plan provided in the final application round must be based on concrete, realistic assumptions, and must indicate how the SFF centre will be financed. This encompasses the applicant's own financing, international funding, other public funding, other private funding, and funding sought from the Research Council. Contributions from the partners to the project should be specified. The costs for the second five-year period must be totalled and entered in the column to the right of the first five-year period.

### **Person for whom a fellowship/position is being sought**

For both the prequalification round and the final round, it is not necessary to specify the names of the candidates for fellowships. It is sufficient to provide the number of fellowships, types of fellowships and the fellowship period. Reflections on and objectives related to gender equality, including target figures for the percentage of women among the research fellows and researchers, should be provided in the project description or a separate attachment.

## **PARTNERS**

Partners are those institutions or companies which, according to the project description, will contribute to the SFF project by performing R&D activities and/or by providing funding. A group comprised of a host institution and its partners is referred to as an SFF consortium and the partners are referred to as consortium participants. The application for prequalification must provide a realistic overview of the relevant consortium participants and their financial contributions, although binding confirmation from the participants is not required at this stage. For the final application, however, a binding written statement confirming participation of partners is required, and this may be included as a separate attachment to the application.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

### **Project Description**

The project description is to provide the basis for a scientific assessment of a proposed project in relation to the assessment criteria stipulated for the project. The project description must state the vision for the centre, describe the plans for the research to be conducted by the centre, describe the potential scientific contribution of the centre, explain how the centre will be organised and managed, and describe the value added inherent in organising the activities as an SFF centre. Project descriptions for both the prequalification round and the final round must not exceed 15 pages, including the list of references, using A4 format with 2 cm margins and 12-point font in Times New Roman. (See Section 4.2.)

### **CV with list of publications**

Applications for both the prequalification round and the final round must include brief CVs, including a list of relevant publications from the past five years, for the centre's director and the other key researchers whose credentials will help to qualify the centre for SFF status. The CVs must not exceed a total of eight pages. No such documentation, transcripts, recommendations or invitations in connection with grants for research stays abroad are required for other personnel, including researchers and research fellows. Please refer to the "Template for CV with publication list for project manager and key researchers".

### **Expert referees**

Applicants may propose the names of individuals qualified to serve as referees in the prequalification round only. Such proposals will not be considered in the final round.

### **Partners**

Confirmation from the partners to the project must be attached to the final application.

## Attachment 2: Application assessment criteria

The following criteria will be used as the basis for the assessment of applications in both the prequalification round and the final round.

Assessment criterion	Description
<b>Scientific merit</b>	<p>Scientific merit is a comprehensive criterion that gives an indication of essential, fundamental aspects of the research project. The scientific merit of a project will be assessed in relation to the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Originality in the form of scientific innovation and/or the development of new knowledge.</li> <li>• Whether the research questions, hypotheses and objectives have been clearly and adequately specified.</li> <li>• The strength of the theoretical approach, operationalisation and use of scientific methods.</li> <li>• Documented knowledge about the research front.</li> <li>• The degree to which the scientific basis of the project is realistic.</li> <li>• The scientific scope in terms of a multi- and interdisciplinary approach, when relevant.</li> </ul>
<b>Project manager and project group</b>	<p>The qualifications of the project manager and project group will be assessed in relation to the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project management.</li> <li>• Expertise and experience within the field of research.</li> <li>• Publication record.</li> <li>• Experience with national and international collaboration on projects.</li> <li>• Experience with supervision of students and junior researchers.</li> <li>• The degree to which the project manager and project group are part of a research environment that has the competence and resources needed to ensure the success of the project.</li> </ul>

<b>Feasibility</b>	<p>The feasibility of the project will be assessed in relation to the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Budget and resource parameters, including financing.</li> <li>• Plans for project implementation, including milestones and deliverables.</li> </ul>
<b>International cooperation</b>	<p>International cooperation will be assessed in relation to the extent and quality of the international cooperation activities set out for the project.</p>
<b>National cooperation</b>	<p>National cooperation will be assessed in relation to the extent to which the project will make use of national research expertise and help to promote national network-building.</p>
<b>Value added generated by establishment of the centre</b>	<p>Value added generated by establishment of the centre will be assessed in relation to how the centre may contribute to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• research activity in the field</li> <li>• the participating research groups</li> <li>• researcher training in the field</li> <li>• the host institution and the other partners</li> </ul>
<b>Dissemination and communication of results</b>	<p>Dissemination and communication of results will be assessed in relation to the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plans for scholarly publication, dissemination and other communication activities</li> <li>• Plans for popular science dissemination and communication activities vis-à-vis the general public as well as users of the project results, including planned use of channels and measures.</li> <li>• Plans for ensuring that important users (in industry, community life and public administration) are incorporated into/take part in dissemination activities for the project.</li> </ul>
<b>Relevance relative to the call for proposals</b>	<p>The grant application will be assessed in relation to the guidelines and stipulations set out in the call for proposals.</p>
<b>Ethical perspectives</b>	<p>The Research Council emphasises the need for projects to maintain high ethical standards and not conflict in any way with the fundamental principles for ethics in research. More information on ethical perspectives may be found in the guidelines for ethics in research drawn up by the national committees for research ethics and in the Act on Ethics and</p>

	Integrity in Research.
<b>Environmental impact</b>	The Research Council attaches importance to whether research projects give adequate consideration to any potential impacts (positive or negative) on the natural environment (external environment), when this is relevant. This applies both to the performance of the projects and to the utilisation of the results.
<b>Recruitment of women</b>	The Research Council considers it important for projects to promote increased recruitment of women to higher academic positions and within the MST subject areas (mathematics, science and technology)
<b>Gender balance in the project</b>	The Research Council works actively to enhance the gender balance in the Norwegian research sector. Each project can play a role in this by seeking to ensure gender balance in the composition of the project group.
<b>Internationalisation</b>	In this context, internationalisation refers to the extent to which the project serves to promote the internationalisation of Norwegian research, by such means as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• International networks.</li><li>• International mobility.</li><li>• Measures that enhance Norway's attractiveness as a host country for research activities.</li></ul>

# THE CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE SCHEME (SFF) REQUIREMENTS AND GUIDELINES<sup>1</sup>

## **1 Purpose of this document**

- 1.1 This document specifies the requirements and guidelines underlying the Norwegian Centres of Excellence scheme, hereafter also referred to as “SFF”, “the SFF scheme”, “Centre of Excellence”, “Centres of Excellence”, “centre”, “centres” or “the centres”.
- 1.2 This document forms the basis for the contract to be entered into between the Research Council of Norway and the individual host institutions for the centres, cf. the definition in Section 2.3, once SFF status and funding have been granted.
- 1.3 When assessing applications for SFF status and funding and when entering into contracts to establish the centres, the Research Council of Norway will attach importance to compliance with the requirements and guidelines laid down in this document.

## **2 General information about the SFF scheme**

- 2.1 The Centres of Excellence (SFF) scheme is a national scheme under the auspices of the Research Council of Norway. The Research Council of Norway provides the basic funding for the scheme with allocations from the annual yield of the Fund for Research and Innovation.
- 2.2 The objective of the SFF scheme is to establish time-limited research centres that conduct targeted, focused, long-term research of high international calibre and where researcher training is an integral component. Scientific merit is the main criterion used in the selection of the centres.
- 2.3 A Centre of Excellence is a time-limited research centre affiliated with a research institution that is responsible for the centre’s activities, hereafter known as the “host institution”. SFF host institutions may be universities (including university hospitals), university colleges or independent research institutes that have the resources needed to fulfil the requirements set out for the SFF scheme. The host institution must serve as the formal applicant for SFF status and funding, act as the Project Owner in any contract signed with the Research Council of Norway regarding the centre, cf. Section 1.2, and bear the practical, scientific and financial responsibility for the establishment, operation and closing down of the centre. The agreement entitles the host institution to designate the centre as a Centre of Excellence and to use the Research Council’s SFF logo.

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<sup>1</sup> Revised February 2011. Applies to the SFF centres established after the 2011 call for proposals under the SFF scheme (SFF-III).

- 2.4 The host institution for a centre may cooperate with one or more research institutions, organisations or enterprises on the establishment, operation and financing of the centre. These participants are referred to as “partners”. Moreover, the centre may have subcontractors that provide it with services. Even though a host institution cooperates with other players on the establishment and operation of a centre, the fact remains that it is the host institution which serves as the formal applicant vis-à-vis the Research Council of Norway with regard to SFF status and funding, is party to any contract signed with the Research Council of Norway, and bears the practical, scientific and financial responsibility for the establishment, operation and closing down of the centre, cf. Section 2.3.

### **3 SFF consortium**

- 3.1 A group consisting of the host institution for a centre and one or more partners, cf. Section 2.4, is referred to as a “SFF consortium” and the partners are referred to as “consortium participants”. Consortium participants must contribute by performing R&D activities and/or by providing financing in accordance with the funding plan for the centre, cf. Section 11.1, with a view to achieving the results outlined in the project description, cf. Section 4. To ensure sufficient flexibility, the SFF scheme will allow changes in the composition of the partners in a SFF consortium over time in accordance with the rules set out in the provisions of the consortium agreement, cf. Sections 3.2 and 11.5.
- 3.2 The host institution is responsible for ensuring that a consortium agreement is drawn up between the participants in the SFF consortium. The consortium agreement is to regulate the organisation and implementation of cooperation within the consortium, and stipulate the reciprocal rights and obligations of the participants. The consortium agreement must include, among other things, provisions specifying the participants’ obligations to contribute resources in accordance with the centre’s funding plan, cf. Section 11.2; rules regarding the opportunity to join and withdraw from the SFF consortium, cf. Section 11.5; rules related to employer’s liability, cf. Section 9.1; and provisions on the right of ownership, right of use, licensing, publication of project results and confidentiality, cf. Section 13.
- 3.3 The host institution is responsible for ensuring that the consortium agreement is in keeping with the principles set forth in this document and the General Terms of Contract issued by the Research Council of Norway. A provision establishing this must be included in the consortium agreement. Knowledge on the part of the Research Council of a consortium agreement in no way implies its approval of any deviations from the principles in this document or from the Research Council’s General Terms of Contract. The consortium agreement must be submitted to the Research Council for informational purposes and is to be attached to any contract on the establishment and operation of the centre entered into between the Research Council and the host institution, cf. Section 1.2.

### **4 Project description, etc.**

The Centre of Excellence is established for the purpose of performing the activities presented in the project description pursuant to the contract between the Research Council of Norway and the host institution, cf. Section 1.2. The project description governs the centre's activities and must specify the primary objective, secondary objectives and progress plan for the research activities described in the SFF application, and must cover the entire first five-year period and the potential subsequent five-year period of the centre's activity, cf. Section 14.1. Further, there must be a dissemination plan that describes the centre's dissemination measures in accordance with Section 8.1 of the Research Council's General Terms of Contract. The project description and dissemination plan must be attached to any contract on the establishment, operation and closing down of the centre entered into between the Research Council of Norway and the host institution, cf. Section 1.2.

## **5 Funding announcement and grant applications**

The Research Council of Norway will issue guidelines for funding announcements, application processing and the criteria for application assessment. Applications are to be submitted by the host institution for the individual centre. The Executive Board of the Research Council of Norway, or a party authorised by the Executive Board, will take the final decision regarding selection of the centres.

## **6 Organisation**

- 6.1 The SFF scheme is based on a model in which the centre is to be a part of the host institution's organisation. The centre must be organised to achieve the objectives specified in the project description in an effective manner, have a form of organisation and governance that is well adapted to the host institution's organisation, and establish routines that ensure good interaction with partners in the SFF consortium, if any, cf. Section 3.1.
- 6.2 The interests of the centre relative to those of the host institution and any consortium participants must be adequately safeguarded; among other things, the centre must have strong top-level management with a high degree of scientific and administrative autonomy within the parameters of the project description, the cost and funding plan as well as the centre's staffing framework. The centre is to have a satisfactory administrative support system.
- 6.3 In the event a centre is awarded SFF status and funding, the host institution must prepare a report describing how the requirements and guidelines in this section are being addressed.

## **7 Location**

- 7.1 As a general rule, the centre is to consist of research groups located at the same site. The phrase "located at the same site" is understood to refer to collaboration between research groups or individual researchers who work in the same building complex.



- 7.2 The SFF scheme also allows the establishment of “virtual” centres. A virtual centre is based on collaboration between research groups which are not located at the same site, but are a greater or lesser physical distance apart, and which have effective communication systems and systems for exchanging personnel between the various segments of the virtual centre. Virtual centres are required to have a common administration and a single research plan in keeping with the project description.
- 7.3 All centres, both those located at the same site and virtual centres, are required to maintain close contacts with leading national and international research groups.
- 7.4 In the event a centre is awarded SFF status and funding, the host institution must prepare a report describing how the requirements and guidelines in this section are being addressed.

## **8 Governance and administration**

- 8.1 The centre may be governed by the host institution’s governing bodies or have its own board. If the centre involves several partners and is organised as a SFF consortium, cf. Section 3.1, the centre must have its own board. In cases where staff members from several faculties at a single university or university college are affiliated with the centre, the centre should also have its own board. The board of the centre is to consist of representatives of the consortium participants, pursuant to the provisions of the consortium agreement, cf. Section 3.2.
- 8.2 The board’s main responsibility is to ensure that the intentions and plans underlying the contract for the establishment of the centre are fulfilled, cf. Section 1.2, and in particular that the activities described in the project description are performed within the stipulated budget and time frameworks. The board is to ensure that cooperation proceeds smoothly between the centre, the host institution and the partners in the SFF consortium, if any, cf. Section 6.1, and in particular must ensure that the host institution, through its representation on the centre’s board and through the centre’s administration, can influence factors of importance to cooperation between the centre and the host institution.
- 8.3 The centre is to be headed by a director. The centre director is to serve as project manager pursuant to the contract between the Research Council of Norway and the host institution, cf. Section 1.2. The centre director must be one of the prominent researchers responsible for the centre attaining SFF status and the prestige associated with it. The director is to have considerable independence in relation to scientific contexts as well as on questions involving the recruitment of staff to the centre. The director and members of the management group, if any, will be appointed by the host institution in consultation with the other participants in the SFF consortium, if any.
- 8.4 The host institution is responsible for ensuring that clear guidelines regarding responsibility and authority are established for the centre’s activities, including the board’s powers of authority, rules for representation on the board and a description of the director’s powers of authority.

- 8.5 In the event a centre is awarded SFF status and funding, the host institution must prepare a report describing how the requirements and guidelines in this section are being addressed.

## **9 Staffing and responsibility for human resources**

- 9.1 The centre is to be developed around researchers who have already demonstrated the potential for a high level of scientific achievement. When assessing the centre's plans, more importance will be attached to the potential to conduct innovative, scientific activities than to the previous scholarly production of key scientific personnel. It should be possible to work at a centre part-time, and staff members should be allowed to perform some of their previous duties at the collaborating institutions and enterprises, e.g. teaching, commissioned research and other ordinary activities. The host institution and the other participants in the SFF consortium, if any, are to decide among themselves how to handle the employer's responsibility for staff at the centre, cf. Section 3.2.
- 9.2 An important part of the centre's activities will be to provide researcher training in its field. Recruitment should include master's and doctoral students as well as post-doctoral research fellows. If the host institution is not authorised to confer master's and doctoral degrees itself, it must have a collaboration agreement with institutions that can.
- 9.3 When recruiting personnel, the centre is required to incorporate gender equality perspectives and actively strive to attract outstanding national and international researchers. In particular, the centre is to facilitate the exchange of staff members between consortium participants, if any, and international partners.
- 9.4 In the event a centre is awarded SFF status and funding, the host institution must prepare a report describing how the requirements and guidelines in this section are being addressed.

## **10 Distribution of responsibility between the Research Council of Norway and the host institution**

- 10.1 The Research Council of Norway is responsible for providing basic funding for the SFF scheme, supervising the selection of the centres, drawing up uniform contracts for the centres, following up the centres on an ongoing basis in accordance with Research Council practice, performing evaluations and taking decisions on whether to extend a contract for a second five-year period.
- 10.2 The host institution is the party to the contract with the Research Council of Norway and bears the practical, scientific and financial responsibility for establishing, implementing and closing down the activities of the centre pursuant to the contract between the Research Council and the host institution, cf. Sections 1.2 and 2.3. The host institution is responsible for drawing up plans to safeguard the SFF investment in the long term, including after the cessation of the Research Council's funding of the centre. The host institution will usually be the largest supplier of scientific staff to the centre,

and is expected to provide administrative support, appropriate premises and other infrastructure for the centre.

## **11 Financing**

- 11.1 In its application for SFF status and funding, the host institution must submit, in addition to a project description, cf. Section 4, a cost and funding plan for the centre's first five-year period and potential subsequent five-year period, cf. Section 14.1. If funding is granted, these plans will form the basis for the contract on the establishment and operation of the centre between the Research Council and the host institution, cf. Section 1.2, and must be attached to that contract.
- 11.2 The funding plan is to be based on the principle that the Research Council of Norway in conjunction with the host institution, or with a SFF consortium consisting of the host institution and its partners, will jointly provide the resources required to perform the centre's activities, cf. Section 3.1. When selecting the centres, the Research Council will take into account the ability of the host institution and any consortium participants to contribute their own resources to the centre and will attach importance to the type of contribution they can provide. The Research Council requires that letters of intent from the planned SFF consortium participants regarding their participation in the financing of the centre during the first five-year period are attached to the final application for SFF status and funding.
- 11.3 Contributions may be provided in the form of own financing, staff placed at the disposal of the centre and/or essential infrastructure. The Research Council of Norway requires that the host institution and any consortium participants cover expenses for the premises, electricity, heating and other infrastructure for the centre, and that a reasonable amount of scientific equipment be placed at the disposal of the centre. Research funding that promotes the centre's activities, e.g. EU funding, project or strategic grants from the Research Council or other sources, may be counted toward the required contribution.
- 11.4 Upon signing the contract with the host institution, the Research Council of Norway will specify its grant to the centre for the first year of operations as well as the date on which the disbursement of funds will be effected. At the same time, the Research Council of Norway will issue a pledge for each year of the first five-year period, cf. Section 14.1. The overall budgetary framework for the first five-year period must be broken down by individual years so that the centre's activities may achieve the desired profile in accordance with the plans set forth in the project description. The Research Council reserves the right to adjust the annual pledges based on the centre's progress report, cf. Section 12.3, and any adjustments in a centre's funding plan and project description as a result of changes in research focus or the funding base. Pledges for a potential final five-year period will be made subsequent to any decision to extend the centre's period of operation, cf. Section 14.1. Allocations from the Research Council of Norway may be transferred from one year to the next.
- 11.5 The SFF scheme will allow changes in the composition of the partners in a SFF consortium over time in accordance with the rules set out in the provisions of the consortium agreement, cf. Section 3.1. Withdrawal from a consortium requires at least six

months' notice. If the withdrawal of a consortium participant leads to a reduction in funding and loss of essential expertise, the centre's board must attempt to secure the resources needed to achieve the objectives stated in the project description. If the changes in the consortium mean that key conditions for the establishment of the centre are no longer met or have been altered significantly, the Research Council is entitled to terminate the contract with the host institution, cf. Section 14.3.

## **12 Scientific and administrative follow-up**

- 12.1 The host institution must submit a progress report using the eRapport electronic reporting system of the Research Council of Norway by no later than 1 March of each year. The report must contain detailed information on scientific, financial and administrative factors as input for the Research Council's annual report to the ministries for the previous year.
- 12.2 The host institution must submit an annual report for the previous year to the Research Council of Norway by no later than 1 April of each year. The report must contain a description of the centre's scientific activities, a profit and loss account with notes and an auditor's report prepared by the host institution's auditor. Centres whose host institutions are audited by the Office of the Auditor General are exempt from submitting an auditor's report.
- 12.3 In consultation with the host institution, the Research Council of Norway will organise "site visits" of the centre at appropriate intervals. Based on the annual reports, the Research Council will perform a review of the progress made in the preceding year and the plans for the future. Representatives of the host institution and other SFF consortium participants, if any, the centre's board, the centre's management and the Research Council of Norway must be present. The Research Council may also invite Norwegian or international experts to participate in the meeting and comment on the progress and the plans.
- 12.4 About 3 ½ years after the centres are established, a midterm evaluation of each centre is to be conducted under the auspices of the Research Council of Norway. The evaluation will be conducted using a common process for all the centres and on the basis of a mandate decided by the Research Council's governing bodies. The evaluation is to assess the scientific results achieved by the centres relative to the original project description. Further, the evaluation is to assess the plans for the centres' scientific activities in the potential final five-year period. In addition, the Research Council of Norway will evaluate the administrative framework at each centre. The Research Council will draw up the mandate for the evaluation, which will primarily be based on the same principles and aspects for evaluation as those used in the previous midterm evaluations of the individual centres.<sup>2</sup>
- 12.5 The midterm evaluation will form the basis for the decision regarding whether to continue the individual centre for the remainder of the total 10-year period or to terminate the centre's SFF funding and status after five years, cf. Section 14.1. The Executive

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<sup>2</sup> "Midterm evaluation of eight Centres of Excellence (SFF-II) – Terms of reference". 26 May 2010. Approved by the Research Board of the Division for Science, 17 June 2010.

Board of the Research Council of Norway, or a party authorised by the Executive Board, will take the final decision on the matter.

### **13 Right of ownership, right of use, licensing, publication of project results and confidentiality**

The SFF scheme is regulated by the Research Council of Norway's General Terms of Contract regarding the right of ownership, right of use, licensing, publication of project results and confidentiality. If the centre is organised as a SFF consortium, cf. Section 3.1, the consortium agreement must contain provisions that govern these areas pursuant to the General Terms of Contract.

### **14 The centres' period of operation – cessation of SFF funding from the Research Council**

- 14.1 Research Council funding for each centre is provided for a period of up to 10 years from the start-up date. A midterm evaluation of each centre will be conducted under the auspices of the Research Council approximately 3 ½ years after start-up, cf. Section 12.5. If the evaluation has a negative outcome, the centre's funding will be discontinued five years after the start-up date. If the evaluation is positive, the centre's period of operation will be extended to 10 years. Once SFF funding from the Research Council has ceased, be it after five or 10 years, the centre will no longer be part of the Centres of Excellence (SFF) scheme.
- 14.2 The Research Council of Norway will establish criteria for the evaluation and the decisions that will form the basis of the termination or extension of the centres after five years, cf. Section 12.5. The host institution must pay special attention to personnel-related factors when closing down a centre. In particular, upon cessation of activity, a host institution must ensure that master's and doctoral students have the opportunity to pursue and complete their study programmes on schedule.
- 14.3 The host institution must ensure that plans are drawn up to effectively utilise the expertise and value added generated by the research activity under the SFF scheme in the long term.
- 14.4 Should a situation arise due to research-related, financial or other reasons which materially alters the assumptions underlying the establishment of a centre or means that a centre can generally no longer be operated on the basis of the principles described in this document, the Research Council of Norway is entitled to terminate the contract with the host institution pursuant to the provisions in the Research Council's General Terms of Contract, including the withdrawal of funding and SFF status.

# FAs rolle i SFF-prosessen 2011 – tidsplan mars – juni:

**Uke 12** (fredag 25.mars): Frist for innsending av **første søknadsutkast** (med forskningsplan, kjerneteam og ledelse) til FA. Innsending må skje **via fakultetene**.

**Uke 14** (5.-7.april): Mulighet for møter med **ekstern konsulent**.

**Uke 19** (onsdag 11.mai): Frist for innsending av **prosjektskisse og foreløpig budsjett** til FA. **Signerte fullmakter** fra institutt, fakultet og eventuelle eksterne samarbeidspartnere må foreligge. Mal for slike fullmakter vil bli utarbeidet ved FA.

**Uke 22** (onsdag 1.juni): Frist for **innlevering av komplett søknad** med endelig budsjett til FA.

**Uke 23** (onsdag 8.juni): Søknadsfrist onsdag 8.juni kl. 13.

**Tidsplanen gjelder søknader koordinert ved UiB.** For søknader som koordineres ved andre institusjoner med UiB som partner: FA vil kunne bistå i søknadsprosessen, men dette vil avhenge av rådgivningskapasitet, fakultetenes prioriteringer og av UiBs rolle i søknaden.

# Budsjettering - SFF

Budsjettmal vil bli utarbeidet ved Økonomiavdelingen.

Prosjekteier (institutt, fakultet eller senter) er ansvarlig for å kostnadsbudsjettere i forhold til forventet aktivitet i senteret.



# SFF-prosessen 2011 – kontaktpersoner ved FA

**MOF:** Sumathi Subramaniam-Håvik

Telefon: 55 58 49 59

E-post: [Sumathi.Subramaniam@adm.uib.no](mailto:Sumathi.Subramaniam@adm.uib.no)

**MN:** Anja Hegen

Telefon: 55 58 20 12

E-post: [Anja.Hegen@adm.uib.no](mailto:Anja.Hegen@adm.uib.no)

**SV, HF, Juridisk fakultet, psykologisk fakultet:** Anne Marie Haga

Telefon: 55 58 38 65

E-post: [Anne.Haga@adm.uib.no](mailto:Anne.Haga@adm.uib.no)

**Marin forskning:** Emmanuel Babatunde

Telefon: 55 58 97 37

E-post: [Emmanuel.Babatunde@adm.uib.no](mailto:Emmanuel.Babatunde@adm.uib.no)

