

Challenge Funding in Ireland

RACHEL IREDALE

HEAD OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WITH RESEARCH



Why Challenge Funding?

- The **scale, complexity and urgency** of issues facing society require a different type of response from research funders.
- Challenge funding stimulates **solution-oriented** responses by directing research activities at specific, often complex, challenges.
- Unlike traditional forms of research funding, challenge funding employs a variety of approaches, like **stage-gates** to release of funding, **accelerated timelines**, and **incentive prizes**, to accelerate the translation of research to impact.
- An important principle in Research Ireland's approach is that societal stakeholders, beneficiaries, and end-users should be engaged in a **collaborative, participatory** manner right from the outset so that their needs can be understood and reflected in research activities in order for the outcomes and impacts to be **meaningful and sustainable**.





SFI Future Innovator Prize 2018

Supporting disruptive STEM solutions that address societal challenges



AI for Societal Good Challenge

Supporting the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to benefit society



Food Challenge

Addressing loss and waste across the full breadth of the food supply chain



The Sustainable Development Goals Challenge

Supporting sustainable solutions addressing development challenges under the UN SDGs



Challenges

- 2050
- Future Digital
- Future Food Systems
- Sustainable Communities
- Digital for Resilience
- Energy Innovation
- Healthy Environment for All
- OurTech

2018

2019

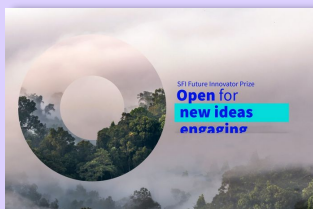
2020

2021

2022

2024

2025



Zero Emissions Challenge

Accelerating progress towards net-zero greenhouse gas emissions



Plastics Challenge

Enabling the sustainable use of plastics in a circular economy



SFI-Defence Organisation Innovation Challenge

Enabling the development of solutions to Defence Organisation challenges



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Research Ireland Innovation in Health and Wellbeing Challenge

Support the development and implementation of effective, scalable and sustainable solutions that address complex health and wellbeing challenges in Ireland

National Challenge Fund: Structure and Process

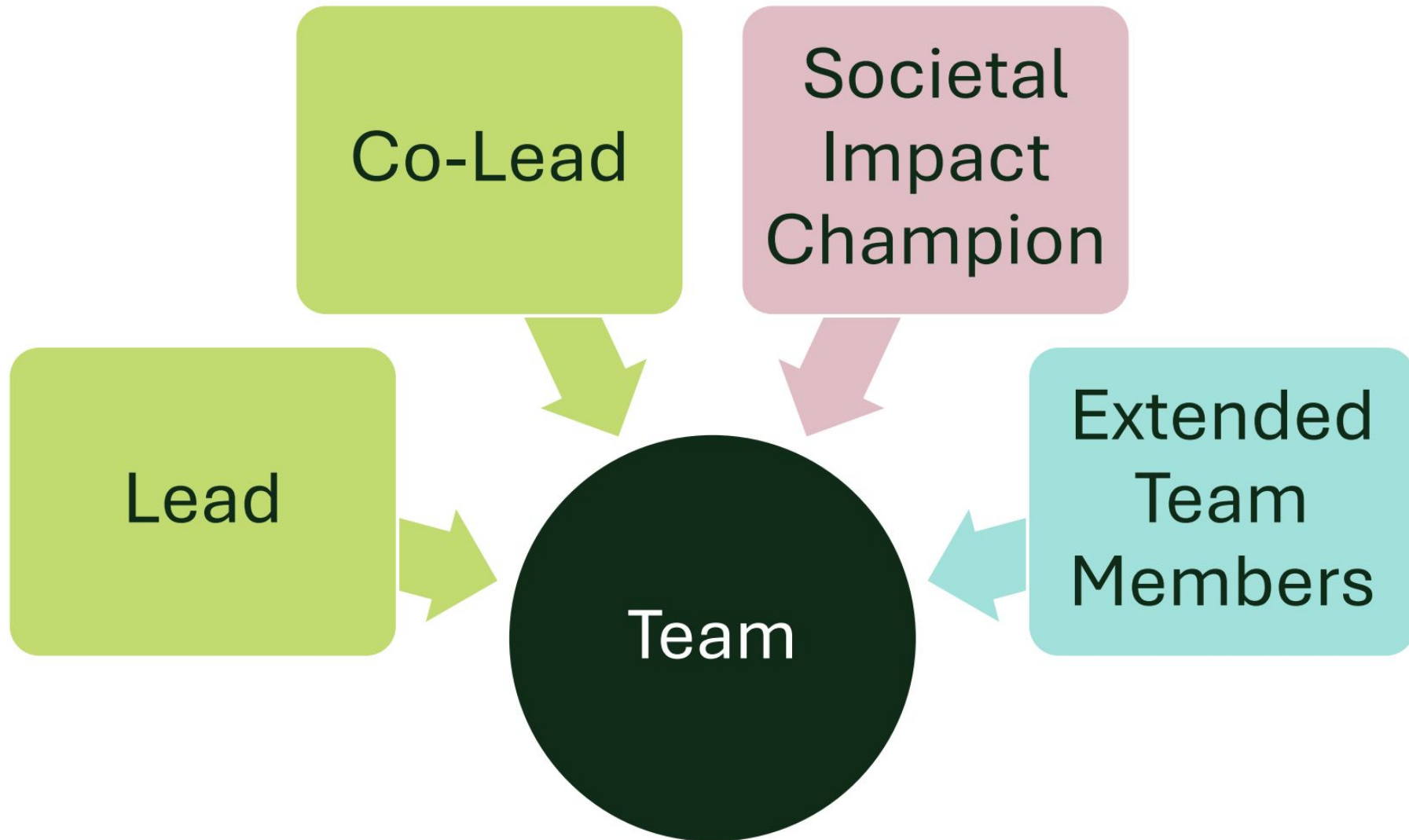


Significantly advance the prototyping activities
Demonstrate how the solution can create value for stakeholders

Training provided:
Theory of Change
Design Thinking
Communications

Panels assess the progress of the finalist teams and the quality and feasibility of their plans for the Prize Award and provide Research Ireland with recommendations on the winning team to receive the €1M Prize Award

What does a Challenge Team look like?

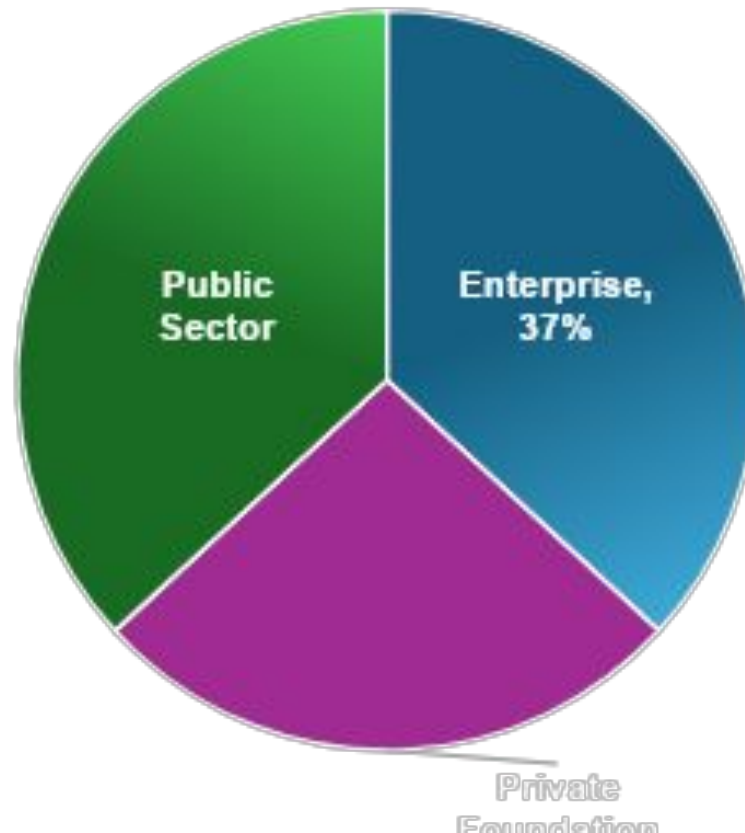


Societal Impact Champions

97
Teams

104
SICs

- **Met Eireann**
- **National Parks and Wildlife Service**
- Dept of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- National Cyber Security Centre
- Cork County Council
- **Dublin City Council**
- Teagasc
- Beaumont Hospital
- Heritage Council
- HSE
- Irish Manufacturing Research
- Western Development Commission



- Easy Hydro Ltd
- EnergyPro Ltd
- HiTech Health
- UAV Evolution
- **ED Tech Ventures**
- **Green Belt Ltd**
- Green Rebel
- RoCfor Consulting Ltd
- Arup
- ENVA Ireland Ltd
- ICL Group
- MOWI
- **Jaguar Land Rover Ltd**
- Dawn Meats Group

- BioPharmaChem Ireland
- **Irish Electric Vehicle Owners Association**
- Irish Heart Foundation
- **ISPCC**
- Lárionad Acmhainní Nádurtha CTR
- The Rediscovery Centre

- The ESE Academy
- Atlantic Salmon Trust
- CLIM-Eat
- TASC- Think-tank for action on social change

NCF Prize Winner for the Our Tech Challenge: Gro Safe

Led by Dr Christina Thorpe and Dr Matt Bowden of Technological University Dublin, with Societal Impact Champion Fiona Jennings from the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

GroSafe is a technology-enabled safeguarding platform designed to combat child grooming through education, support, and reporting. By empowering children and caregivers through this platform, the team aims to build societal resistance, reduce exploitation, and foster a culture of safe and trusted disclosure.

The National Challenge Fund demonstrates the real impact of strategic EU investment on Irish society. Protecting the environment and children, while upholding fundamental rights, remains a core priority for the European Commission. Research and innovation are key to a just transition to a climate-neutral society and a fair, safe digital world.

EU Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law and Consumer Protection, Michael McGrath.

