Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

FAQ – VIFF Request for EOIs

Note: *This FAQ for the Schmidt Futures [Virtual Institute on Feedstocks of the Future](#) (VIFF) and its associated [Request for Expressions of Intent](#) (EOIs) will be updated as needed during the submission period. If you have any questions not listed here, please contact [viff@schmidtfutures.com](#) with "EOI Question" in the subject line.*

Updated June 5, 2023.

Programmatic Questions

What is a virtual institute?

A Schmidt Futures Virtual Institute of Science is a distributed network of carefully selected scientific and technical talent that aims to solve scientific challenges with societal relevance by working across institutions and disciplines. Virtual Institutes take high-risk bets that apply advanced computing and innovative technologies to STEM research and development. They are designed to attract, excite, and retain the best researchers and students in the field. Supported projects are typically multi-institutional with one lead institution, a small number of host institutions (2-3 max), and a wider network of partner institutions. Schmidt Futures aims to assist the virtual institutes by leveraging our existing talent network, and to maximize their impact through various community and knowledge-sharing activities, thus disseminating new knowledge, spurring new innovation, and further extending the Schmidt Futures talent network.

VIFF is one of several Schmidt Futures Virtual Institutes of Science working across institutions and disciplines. Examples of other virtual institutes can be found on the Schmidt Futures [website](#).

May the roadmap outlined for proposed work identified in the EOI be modified at the invited proposal stage? (added June 5)

Yes. However, we urge project teams to put forward a well-developed EOI. The EOI stage is critical to our evaluation of the importance and relevance of the grand challenge being addressed, project teams' approaches to driving cross-cutting collaborations, and what teams may contribute to the VI network in order to tackle technological, cultural, and logistical challenges that are pervasive in this field.

What project start and end dates should we plan for? (added June 5)

We aim to start projects about six months after EOI submission: approximately December 2023/January 2024. Projects are expected to run for five years, with anticipated end dates in December 2028/January 2029. However, there is some flexibility in this timeframe. Shorter project periods are also acceptable.

Team Organization Questions

Are we able to replace team members if they need to drop off the bid?

Yes.

Can we make additions or changes to the team beyond those listed in the expression of interest?

Yes, there is flexibility in how teams come together. We will provide more information on team restructuring or merging after the EOI stage.

Can scientists who don't have a permanent position at the time of submission still act as PI for their institution (assuming that their salary is guaranteed for the project duration)?

Yes.

Can one institution submit multiple EOIs?

Yes.

Is there any limit on the number of EOIs an individual can be involved in?

No. An individual PI of one project can be a partner or co-PI on another proposal and serve on multiple EOIs. If a co-PI or other team member is not planning to manage the other proposed project(s) and is only a contributor or local organizer, that is also okay. Prior experience suggests that Lead PI duties are not to be taken lightly.

Do proposals need to be led/coordinated by U.S.-based research centers?

Yes.

Can the team include partners from industry?

Yes. For-profit companies are eligible to apply as part of a consortium of researchers led by a not-for-profit research institution.

Can the Lead PI be an early career researcher? Is previous experience managing large projects a requirement, or can the team argue for the capacity to do without prior experience? (added June 5)

Yes, the Lead PI can be an early career researcher. Collectively, teams should demonstrate that the PIs and partner institutions have the scientific ability, relevant expertise, scientific project management experience, and capacity to implement a large project. We are looking for teams with the relevant expertise to advance the proposed work. Including individuals with such experience can help demonstrate that your team has this capacity. Keep in mind that EOIs will undergo an initial blinded review, and that it is possible to make additions and changes to the team identified in the EOI at the invited proposal stage.

How will project teams be integrated in the virtual institute (VI)? (added June 5)

Funded VIFF project teams will be integrated with support from VIFF program staff and a Scientific Advisory Board. Once projects are selected, the Scientific Advisory Board and VIFF program staff will work with project teams to determine specific integration activities that could benefit the VI.

Project integration activities may include:
● Sharing of personnel, expertise, equipment, and data
● Codesign, development, and sharing of common data platforms and protocols
● Collaboration on research and analytical design and activities
● Development of joint publications
● Joint evaluation of progress towards program goals

The VIFF program team aspires to facilitate VI integration across funded teams via activities that may include:
● In-person and virtual convenings
● Open-access data sharing
● Early career researcher and community engagement

We anticipate that the VIFF program team will play an active role in integrating funded project teams throughout the program's duration. We plan to ensure team alignment in terms of topic area, sharing resources and personnel, and facilitating collaborations. Additional information about project integration will be provided at the invited proposal stage.

The Request for EOIs indicates that up to five proposals will ultimately be selected. Will each funded proposal be a virtual institute (VI) into itself, or will they collectively form a VI? Stated otherwise, will the selection team be looking for synergies among the selected proposals? (added June 5)

Project teams selected to join VIFF will collectively form the VI. While projects may have different objectives and address different challenges, we expect that they will collaborate. We will consider potential synergies among selected proposals, and will provide additional information on project collaboration and integration at the invited proposal stage.

Financial Questions

Should Schmidt Futures' cap of 10% for indirect costs be considered as part of the proposed budget total?

Yes. Detailed budgets will not be included in the EOI stage. These will be elaborated in the invited proposal stage.

Are there any restrictions we should be aware of regarding what we can use the funding for?

Restrictions include those limited by law, regulations, or scientific collaborations with those in sanctioned nations. Beyond that, one of the intentions of VIFF is to provide research awards with relatively flexible funds over an extended period (five years). VIFF awards are intended to help break down artificial walls to support the best scientific research and interdisciplinary collaborations to advance the scientific mission and scope of VIFF.

Previous awardees of Schmidt Futures Virtual Institutes have used these flexible funds to support graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and other scientists; support to facilitate conferences, meetings, and exchanges among personnel at collaborating institutions; secure software engineering support and cloud computing infrastructure; and other standard research expenses.

Can you elaborate on funding totals for the solicitation? (added June 5)

We anticipate funding up to five projects, over five years, that will collectively form the virtual institute. Each individual project may propose a total project budget of up to $10M. The ultimate number of projects and individual project funding levels will depend on a number of factors.

Can funds be used to purchase equipment? (added June 5)

Yes. So long as the equipment is necessary for the research activity proposed in the EOI, and is not otherwise available to the project team, equipment purchases are largely acceptable.

Does Schmidt Futures require project teams to identify matching funds? (added June 5)

No.

Other Questions

Where can I find more information about Schmidt Futures?

Please see common questions about Schmidt Futures, a philanthropic initiative of Eric and Wendy Schmidt, [here](#).