



# FOCUSED RESEARCH INVESTMENTS

## Opportunity Space Proposal Handbook

Spring 2026

### SUMMARY

<b>Call for Opportunity Space proposals opens</b>	June 10, 2026
<b>Webinar: Opportunity Spaces (Zoom)</b>	June 25, 2026, 1:00 pm (ADT)
<b>How to apply</b>	<a href="#">Application Form</a>
<b>Call for Opportunity Space proposals closes</b>	August 19, 2026, 1:00 pm (ADT)
<b>Up to 6 successful applicants invited to submit full FRI proposals</b>	September 15, 2026
<b>Full FRI proposals due</b>	November 10, 2026, 1:00 pm (AST)
<b>FRI Pitches</b>	November 2026
<b>Successful FRI recipient teams notified</b>	Early 2027
<b>FRI funding start</b>	Spring 2027
<b>Funding available</b>	Per project: \$1M to \$5M: Total for round: \$6 M
<b>Investment period</b>	2 to 5 years



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# DEFINITIONS

The following key terms will be used throughout this document, and to the extent possible should be used in proposals.

**BENEFICIARY:** a party for whom the research has an impact (e.g., improved health, financial gain, etc.).

**END USER:** a party who applies research outputs to produce economic outcomes. This may either be done for themselves as a group, or for *beneficiaries*.

**OPPORTUNITY SPACE:** the sector-level challenge(s) limiting economic growth, where research is needed to advance solutions.

**FRI:** the project(s) that would be funded to pursue the proposed outcome(s).

**IMPACT:** outcomes that endure over the longer term – a change in conditions for the beneficiaries.

**OUTCOME:** the change, benefit or improvement that accrues to those outside the research system as a result of research outputs.

**OUTPUT:** the result of research efforts – what is produced.

**PRIMARY APPLICANTS:** the individual(s) proposing the Opportunity Space and likely to be the primary authors of an FRI proposal.

**PROJECTS:** research activities that have research outputs with the intent of producing outcomes. The FRI may undertake multiple component research projects.

The terms outcome, output, role, indicator, end, purpose, focus, vision, impact, challenge, public benefit, among others, are used in the singular but may also be interpreted in the plural.

# ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Focused Research Investment (FRI) program is one of two core funding mechanisms that Research Nova Scotia (RNS) uses to support research that contributes to direct and tangible economic outcomes in Nova Scotia.

Please visit the [RNS website](#) for details about the organizational mandate and the [FRI program](#).

The purpose of this document is to outline the process for proposing an Opportunity Space within which, if selected, an FRI can be developed.


**Opportunity Spaces** exist where there are sector-level challenges inhibiting economic growth that can be solved through research (not a limitation of policy or implementation), and where there are partners with whom to work, private sector interest, and existing research capacity. FRI initiatives develop a research project(s) that respond to Opportunity Spaces.

When initially conceived in [our strategy](#), Opportunity Spaces were to be identified by industry tables: groups of leaders and experts representing a sector (or subsector) that could speak to the pivotal challenges or gaps impeding the advancement or growth of the sector. Given the breadth and diversity of potential sectors and sub-sectors, opening up the discussion as widely as possible is fairer, more inclusive, and more transparent and enables a diverse set of proposals to be developed. Furthermore, it is not feasible to organize well-rounded and inclusive tables for every sector and sub-sector across Nova Scotia in a timely fashion over the summer.

Therefore, RNS has designed a two-phase process whereby applicants are invited to propose an Opportunity Space – which will be vetted by industry advisors. If the Opportunity Space is selected, the applicant will then be invited to submit a full FRI proposal.

## Application and Assessment Process

Applicants need to make a clear and compelling case for an Opportunity Space's importance and potential to generate economic value for Nova Scotia in the three sectors defined as priorities for RNS: Natural Resources, Climate Change & Clean Energy; Life Sciences & Health Sciences; and Construction & Transportation. Opportunity Space Proposals will be evaluated using the criteria outlined below (see Basis of Selection). RNS will select Opportunity Spaces that are consequential, under-invested, and ripe for a research contribution.



As outlined in the evaluation criteria, an Opportunity Space must lend itself to an FRI. The Opportunity Space Proposal must include a high-level description of the FRI that the applicants would propose if invited.

FRI target sector- or field-building research, and exist where coordination across groups, disciplines, or sectors is required. They are responsive to Opportunity Spaces. Each FRI initiative is designed as an integrated and well-managed set of component research projects needed by end users to realize economic outcomes for Nova Scotia. Those who are expected to benefit from the research (e.g., end users) are active and evident participants in shaping the proposed outcomes, activities, and indicators. FRI are large-scale, longer-term initiatives, valued at \$1 to \$5M over 2 to 5 years.

Opportunity Space Proposals will be reviewed by RNS and sector specific advisors or industry leads with sufficient expertise in the domain to validate that the proposed Opportunity Space addresses a pressing sector challenge.

Where alignment has been identified and RNS sees the potential for an FRI proposal to be strengthened, teams may be brought together to explore merging.

A maximum of six Opportunity Spaces proponents will be selected to submit a full FRI proposal.

During the development of the Opportunity Space and FRI proposals, applicants will have access to a skilled facilitator for clarity around program requirements and for support with strategy and proposal development.

## Basis of Selection

FRI are an *investment* and RNS is the prospective *institutional investor*. RNS has a duty to select funding opportunities that realize positive economic outcomes for Nova Scotia.

Opportunity Spaces will be assessed based on five elements:

- **Priority:** the issue is a priority for Nova Scotia – urgent, important, salient, and recognizably affecting Nova Scotians – and Nova Scotia can leverage a competitive edge to address it. There is high potential to realize one of the three primary outcomes (see below).
- **Research:** research is what is needed to solve the problem.
- **Expertise:** Nova Scotia has the expertise, partners, resources and interest in undertaking the research, or there is a strong case for building local capacity or investing in research outside of Nova Scotia.
- **RNS is the right organization to invest in the research:** either there is no other organization better suited, or RNS can be a valuable supporting partner in the work.

- **Suitability for an FRI:** the Opportunity Space must lend itself to an FRI by requiring coordination across groups within the sector to advance a series of integrated component research projects.

## Primary Outcomes

The Minister of Advanced Education issued [Provincial Research Priorities for Research NS](#) to describe “what the government expects to achieve by investing in research through Research Nova Scotia”. To enable RNS to “demonstrate advancements” as the Minister expects, a [Statement of Purpose](#) has been developed to outline how funded projects must realize economic outcomes.

Applicants for funding must specify one of the following three primary outcomes in:

- a. **Market creation or growth:** increased economic value or wealth through new products, services, or value chains, or creation or expansion of markets.
- b. **Productivity gains:** improved efficiency, effectiveness, or output of an organization, sector, or system relative to the resources required (labour, capital, energy, materials, or time)
- c. **Policy or regulatory improvement:** improved regulation, standards, public guidance, procurement, or policy implementation that lowers uncertainty, reduces compliance cost, improves market functioning, or enables market expansion.

## Key Resources

RNS provides a comprehensive set of materials to support prospective applicants. Applicants are expected to review these materials carefully before submitting a proposal.

In addition to this handbook, these materials include:

- RNS [Statement of Purpose](#), including the economic outcomes framework and expectations for demonstrating fit for funding
- [RNS’s Strategic Plan](#) and [strategy website](#)
- Information on the [priority sectors](#) and [sector objectives](#) defined by the provincial government.
- Information on the [FRI program](#)

Applicants may contact RNS staff for additional information. For questions concerning Opportunity Spaces or FRI in general, contact Jaymi Cormier at [Jaymi.Cormier@researchns.ca](mailto:Jaymi.Cormier@researchns.ca). For questions related to the application materials or program requirements **before** the submission deadline, contact [apply@researchns.ca](mailto:apply@researchns.ca).

# PROPOSAL CONTENT & QUESTION GUIDANCE

Applicants are the primary point of contact and must meet all eligibility requirements.

## 1. COVER PAGE

The cover page of the proposal must include the following information:

**OPPORTUNITY SPACE NAME:** the name of the proposed Opportunity Space. This name will be used for communication purposes. Spell out any scientific symbols and/or acronyms. This need not be identical to the name used at the FRI proposal stage.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** name(s), affiliation(s), and contact information of the applicant(s). CVs for the applicant(s) (max 2 pages each CV) should be uploaded as separate PDFs.

**ANTICIPATED PROJECT VALUE:** Indicate the anticipated amount to be requested from RNS, total project value and duration of the FRI. FRI initiatives may span two to five years and can request \$1 to \$5 million from RNS. Partner co-funding is a requirement; however there is no specified target or minimum amount.

## 2. OPPORTUNITY SPACE PROPOSAL

The Opportunity Space Proposal must include the following sections in the order presented below. The maximum word limit is **3,000 words** for the whole proposal. Figures may be included.

The narrative in sections 2A - 2E must provide a convincing argument on both the importance of the impact and the quality of the investment.

Applicants can choose how to allocate space to each section. Each will be equally weighted in the assessment. The use of headings is strongly encouraged. Avoid scientific jargon, and write using accessible language, appropriate for a multidisciplinary review process.

**2A. PRIORITY:** What is the sector or field-level challenge? How is it urgent, important, salient for Nova Scotia? If addressed, what potential does this challenge offer for achieving one of three priority outcomes?

**2B. RESEARCH-BASED:** Describe the research that is needed to solve the problem (and why it is not a limitation of policy or implementation). What are the central research questions? What is the existing evidence base?

**2C. COORDINATION:** FRI are designed to support initiatives where knowledge in the field has advanced to a stage where a coordinated team and set of projects are what is required to materially advance toward a solution. Describe why an active coordination model is appropriate and timely for this Opportunity Space.

**2D. EXPERTISE & INTEREST:** Describe the end users, research expertise, partners, resources and interest that would support the realization of an FRI developed for the Opportunity Space. If engagement with end users and partners has been initiated, characterize the nature of the discussion.

**2E. FOCUSED RESEARCH INVESTMENT (FRI):** Describe the FRI that would be built if this Opportunity Space is selected.

## ASSESSMENT OF OPPORTUNITY SPACE PROPOSALS

RNS will select Opportunity Spaces that are consequential, under-invested, and ripe for a research contribution. Proposals will be evaluated against five elements using the rubric below. All elements are equally weighted.

The following 3-point scale will be used to rate each element:

- **Excellent:** The proposal is exceptional and impressive; thoughtfully and completely developed with no concerns or missing information. Nothing of any consequence should be changed.
- **Good/sufficient:** There are no significant gaps or concerns, however minor questions or ambiguities may remain. Minimum requirements have been met.
- **Poor:** Significant concerns, gaps or inconsistencies exist. Confidence in the approach is in question.

**Stage 1A - RNS Review:** RNS will complete an initial assessment. Each element must be assessed as 'good/sufficient' or above to move on.

Where RNS is uncertain of any part of this assessment, staff may reach out to individual applicants to clarify ambiguity, but not to address gaps or incomplete information.

Where potential synergies exist across one or more Opportunity Spaces, RNS may reach out to explore the potential to merge.

**Stage 1B – Industry Advisor Review:** Select Opportunity Space proposals will undergo an assessment by sector-specific representatives who have sufficient expertise in the domain to validate that the proposed Opportunity Space indeed addresses a pressing challenge for the sector.

Following the assessment process, a maximum of six teams will be invited to submit FRI proposals. Guidelines for the FRI proposal will be issued at that time.

<b>OPPORTUNITY SPACE PROPOSAL – EVALUATION RUBRIC</b>	
<b>ELEMENTS</b>	<b>RANKING</b>
<b>Priority:</b> the rationale for why the challenge is a priority for Nova Scotia (i.e., urgent, important, salient, recognizably affecting Nova Scotians) is clear and compelling. The potential to realize at least one of the three primary outcomes is clear.	
<b>Research:</b> it is clear why research is needed to solve the challenge for the sector.	
<b>Expertise:</b> the team has the necessary expertise, partners, resources and interest from key parties to undertake the research.	
<b>RNS is the right investor:</b> either there is no other organization that is better suited, or RNS can be a valuable supporting partner to the work.	
<b>Suitability for an FRI:</b> the sector has advanced to a stage that coordination across groups or disciplines is what is needed to overcome the challenge. There is a pathway to realize economic outcomes through a set of integrated component research projects.	
Overall ranking of the Opportunity Space	
Comments	