Proposal Guidelines

To make it easy for you to further your research, Instruct offers open access to structural biology infrastructure at our Instruct Centres. The application and review process is efficient, transparent and quick, with a target turnaround time of four weeks.

Applications for access can be submitted at any time. Periodically, special calls for access will be published with a defined deadline. These special calls carry specific criteria, so please read the calls carefully.

Every application is carefully evaluated on its scientific merit; we are looking for research projects that demonstrate innovative approaches within integrative structural biology. In some cases, the applicant may be asked to revise the proposal and resubmit for evaluation. The Instruct office is always willing to consider a revised proposal.

The aim of Instruct is to encourage the integrative use of technology and methodologies. However, applications for individual Instruct platforms are also possible where local facilities provide the other techniques required. Further information on who qualifies, what the success criteria are and the guidelines on which they are based are all provided within the site. An explanation on what Instruct Access funding provides is available here.

Review our catalogue of technology, receive our support and make your application.

Application step by step

1 Select Platforms and Funding

In this step you build your research plan by selecting the platforms which will be required to undertake your proposal. You should indicated both the technologies you are requesting access to and the ones available at your home institute. Please note that Instruct funding is only provided for the visits to Instruct Centres. Please use the free text box to briefly describe your home institute platforms to help reviewers to access the viability of your proposal.

When choosing the platforms to use you would be able to choose different locations and funding routes. Please note that some funding routes are not only available at all Instruct Centres. Reviewers may give feedback as to which platforms are more suitable for your needs.

2 Confirm Platform Selection

At this stage you are requested to confirm the platforms you have selected. At this point you can also change the order of the visits. You can come back to select more platforms, you can save and
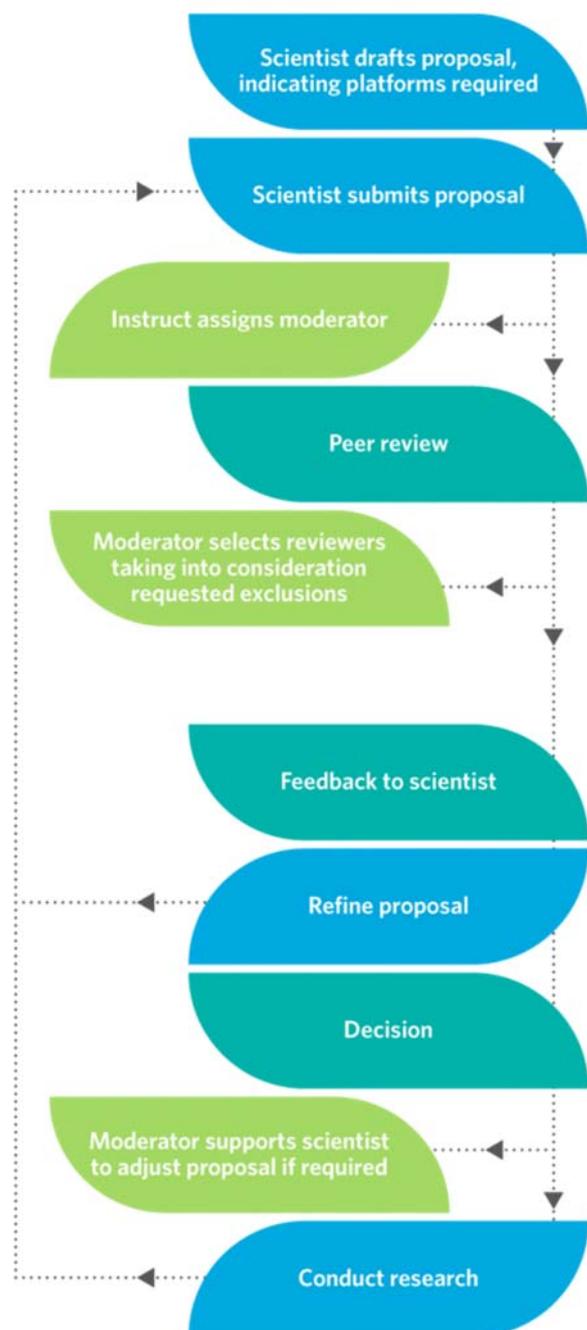
come back later or you can continue with your application.

3 Proposal Details

All of the fields from the 'proposal details' will need to be completed as required by your chosen funding routes with details of your proposed use of the facilities.

Context and Objectives: You need to describe the background and rationale to the project as well as the expected impact of the research.

Research Programme and Methodology: Describe the work planned which should have elements that are ambitious and innovative or tackle difficult problems with a fresh approach. Routine service access is not normally acceptable.

Background in your lab and current results: Proposal should contain sufficient preliminary data to show that the experiments work is feasible: e.g. that material is of sufficient quality and quantity for requested technologies; that there is data supporting the scientific approach; that there are no safety or ethical issues preventing access.

Relevant publications: The publications should provide information on potential impact of the work and the likelihood of success. i.e. provide preliminary data or information that allows the reviewers to judge if the work is feasible and of a suitable scope. If the data does not originate from your own research, please also include publications to show your own strengths in the field.

4 Build Your Team

Choose which Instruct scientists will be involved in your proposal. This includes any scientist who will be performing a visit.

Principal Investigator: Instruct consider principal investigator to a scientist eligible by their institution to apply for grants. If you are not a PI the system will send an automatic message for authorisation of the proposal. Please note that the user profile will be the reviewer main source of information about the applicant and the team.

Team members: In addition to the applicant indicate other members of your home institution that will be part of the research. Only scientists mentioned in this session will be eligible to access the Instruct centres if the proposal is approved. Please note that the user profile will be the reviewer main source of information about the applicant and the team.

5 Exclude Reviewers

This is your opportunity to exclude reviewers that may have conflict of interest.

6 Confirm and Submit Proposal

Please review you proposal before submitting. Once you submit you can you to you dashboard to check and follow the status. If you have any questions contact us through your proposal messaging online or by email at admin@structuralbiology.eu

What happens next?

Your proposal will be assigned a moderator by Instruct office. The moderator will assign three reviewers. You can follow the status of your proposal in your dash board. You might find it useful to read the Guidelines below which are followed by Moderators and Reviewers when they assess a proposal submitted to Instruct. If your proposal is successful read our access guidelines here

Guidelines for Moderators and Reviewers
Guidelines for Moderators:
Moderators should assess proposals according to the following initial criteria:
- **Eligibility:** Proposals must originate from an Instruct member country

- **Field of research and request for platform access:** The research should fall within the broad field of structural cell biology and be well matched to the infrastructure provided through Instruct.

Moderators should choose a total of three reviewers for each proposal; one internal reviewer and two external reviewers. ***Reviewers should be appointed and confirmed as promptly as possible and at most within 4 days. The aim is to provide a decision to the proposer within 2 weeks of submission.***

When the reviews have been returned, the Moderator should then action one of three outcomes:

Approval; Revision; Rejection.

The Moderator may comment on the proposal outcome including advice on next steps for the proposer. The proposer will receive all three reviewers' comments, their scores and the Moderator's comments.

Appeals: If the proposer appeals the review decision, the Moderator, with the help of the Instruct Secretary, will manage the revision process which may require referral to the Access Committee. The Moderator will have discretion to revise the decision where the score is 3-5, but should refer the appeal to the Access Committee where the original score is 0-2. The Moderator may refer back to the reviewers at any time for help in this process. The Moderator (with the help of the Secretary) will keep the proposer informed of the process and outcome of the appeal.

The Moderator may invite the proposer to resubmit a revised proposal, and may provide guidance on how to improve the proposal. The Instruct office is willing to reconsider revised proposals at any time.

Guidelines for Reviewers:

Instruct will provide European researchers with access to instrumentation and expertise for integrated structural biology through its multi-site infrastructure, with the aim to facilitate scientists in addressing biological problems that have proven intractable or difficult with more routine technological approaches. All proposals will be evaluated by three reviewers (one internal to Instruct and two external) and must be accepted by the platform(s) nominated in the proposal. A decision by the reviewers on the acceptance of a proposal is without prejudice to the right of a platform to decline access on reasonable grounds (including conflict of interest, capacity limitations, financial limitations) and in accordance with the terms of the relevant Centre Agreement. All platforms have a local right of veto for access.

Reviewers should score proposals according to the following criteria: ***Reviews should be returned within 1 week.***

1.   Field and scope of research (score 1= suitable field of study; 0 = not suitable for Instruct: threshold = 1/1)

The subject category of the proposal should fall within structural cell biology. This may include some functional work that may or may not be undertaken at an Instruct Centre. The proposals may be of two types:

- Single access proposal - requests access for a single experiment to a single platform facility which is unavailable in the proposer's national facilities.
- Integrated access proposal – proposes a project involving an integrated experimental approach with more than 2 technology platforms requested for access. These proposals may span several months and include some flexibility in planning the order and scale of platform access.

The work proposed should have elements that are ambitious and innovative or tackle difficult problems with a fresh approach. Routine service access is not normally acceptable.

2.   Impact of the research (score 3 = high impact; 2 = moderate impact; 1 = low impact; 0 = not worthy of Instruct support; where impact score = 1, add +1 if request is for single technology platform access: threshold=2/3)

In many cases, the work proposed will be part of an existing experimental project which has been scientifically peer-reviewed by an external national or international funding body. It is not the intention of Instruct to duplicate this review process. However, an evaluation of the impact

of the proposed work will help to prioritise proposals in cases where platform capacity or funding might be limited.

3.   Preliminary data and Plan B (score 3 = good preliminary data available and plan B in place; score 2 = some further data needed, plan B in place; score 1 = some further data needed and no plan B; score 0 = data not provided or not sufficient: threshold = 2/3 [either score 2 or 1+1 for single access])

Proposals should contain sufficient preliminary data to show that the experimental work is feasible: e.g. that material is of sufficient quality and quantity for requested technologies; that there is data supporting the scientific approach; that there are no safety or ethical issues preventing access.

Where a multi-platform project is proposed, some flexibility in the approach to take account of poor outcome should be included. The Reviewer should make a judgement about whether the nominated platform location(s) is optimal for the objectives and may offer advice on other choices.

4.   Strengths and weaknesses (score 1 = balance on strengths; score 0 = balance on weaknesses: threshold = 1/1)

The strengths and weaknesses of the proposal should be evaluated, including a judgement on whether the platforms requested are optimal for achieving the best experimental outcome. Suggestions on other platforms or approaches may be made.

Maximum score = 9
Threshold score for acceptance = 6
Revision required = scores 3-5
Rejected = scores 0-2

The Moderator will make both the scores and the reviewers' comments available to the proposer when feedback on the decision is given.

Appeals: If the proposer wishes to appeal the decision from the Moderator, he/she must contact the Moderator directly in the first instance and explain the reasons for appeal. The Moderator will decide whether the decision can be revised without referral back to the reviewers or whether it requires referral to reviewers and/or the Access Committee. The Moderator (who may delegate this to the Secretary) will keep the proposer informed of the process and outcome of the appeal.

Reporting: After approval, the Secretary will facilitate the access process to each platform, ensuring that the funding options are clear. Access reports must be logged via the website by the proposer after completion of the work at each platform; these will also be monitored by the Secretary and non-completion will preclude the proposer from further approval for access to Instruct infrastructure.

Help: Moderators and Reviewers may contact Secretary@structuralbiology.eu for help with the on-line review process. Specifically, Moderator or Reviewer may wish to take advice from the requested platform(s) about technical feasibility of the work proposed. This can be done directly (bearing in mind issues of confidentiality of the proposed work) or through the Secretary.