

CANADA FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATION

# Exceptional Opportunities Fund – COVID-19

Guidelines for reviewers  
June 2020

**INNOVATION.CA**



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# MANDATE OF THE CANADA FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATION

Created by the Government of Canada in 1997, the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) strives to build our nation's capacity to undertake world-class research and technology development to benefit Canadians. Thanks to CFI investment in state-of-the-art facilities and equipment, universities, colleges, research hospitals and non-profit research institutions are attracting and retaining the world's top talent, training the next generation of researchers, supporting private-sector innovation and creating high-quality jobs that strengthen Canada's position in today's knowledge economy. Read more at [Innovation.ca](http://Innovation.ca)

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## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

These guidelines are for researchers and institutional research services personnel preparing and submitting a proposal to the Exceptional Opportunities Fund (EOF) – COVID-19 competition.

The threat of infectious disease continues to be a major global concern for human health and is a key driver of healthcare system costs, human lives lost and economic turmoil. According to the United Nations, we are now facing an unprecedented "global health crisis — one that is killing people, spreading human suffering, and upending people's lives. But this is much more than a health crisis. It is a human, economic and social crisis. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which has been characterized as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), is attacking societies at their core."<sup>1</sup>

In response to the current pandemic, the CFI is launching an EOF – COVID-19 competition and investing up to \$25 million with the objective of supporting urgent needs for equipment for ongoing research related to COVID-19. As an exception to our usual competitions, the CFI will cover up to 100 percent of the eligible costs of a project. However, the CFI encourages institutions to seek funding from other partners when possible, as this will broaden the scope of the initiative.

The EOF competition is open for proposals from all disciplines that can demonstrate a direct and immediate impact on current and pressing research issues related to COVID-19. This may include, but is not limited to, research in epidemiology, virology, vaccine development, diagnostics, therapeutic devices, mental health, social and economic policy and public health response.

To qualify for this funding opportunity, a project must meet the following requirements:

- The infrastructure component must be an indispensable element of an ongoing research project related to COVID-19.
- The infrastructure component **must be acquired at the latest by March 31, 2021**.

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1 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/everyone-included-covid-19.html>

Proposals are evaluated based on the following assessment criteria:

- Research or technology development
- Researchers
- Infrastructure
- Sustainability
- Benefits to Canadians

## Submission deadline

The deadline for submitting proposals is **July 6, 2020 at 23:59 EDT**. Please note that the CFI Awards Management System (CAMS) will be ready to receive proposals starting **June 10, 2020**.

## Eligible institutions

Universities, research hospitals, research institutes and non-profit institutions recognized as eligible by the CFI can apply to the EOF – COVID-19 competition. Research hospitals and research institutes must apply through the eligible university with which they are affiliated.

## Institutional envelopes

An institutional envelope is the upper limit on the total value of funding that an eligible institution may request. It is based on the average share of research funding that the institution received from the three federal research funding agencies over the period 2014–15 through 2016–17 (which is the most recent available data).

Eligible institutions without a specified institutional envelope will receive an envelope of \$200,000. Research hospitals and research institutes must apply within the institutional envelope of the eligible university with which they are affiliated.

The sum of all institutional envelopes is twice the competition budget to aim for an approximate funding rate of 50 percent.

## Eligible researchers

Up to five researchers may be listed on the proposal to either work collaboratively using the same requested infrastructure, or to work independently while sharing the requested infrastructure. For the latter, the CFI requires that the justification for the infrastructure be articulated for each researcher. The researchers listed in the proposal must be:

- Recognized leaders in areas of research related to COVID-19;
- Currently engaged in research or technology development activities related to COVID-19 that are innovative, feasible and meet international standards.

## Eligible infrastructure projects

Eligible institutions can submit proposals requesting between \$200,000 and \$1.5 million per proposal from the CFI.

To qualify for this funding opportunity, a project must meet the following requirements:

- The infrastructure component must be an indispensable element of a current research project related to COVID-19.
- The infrastructure component **must be acquired at the latest by March 31, 2021**.

Please note that construction costs are not eligible expenses for this competition. However, costs of minor renovations are eligible if the renovations can be completed by **March 31, 2021**.

To be eligible for funding, research infrastructure expenditures must have been incurred after **April 1, 2020**. We consider expenditures incurred when goods are received, services have been rendered or work has been performed.

For more information on CFI eligibility guidelines, please refer to the CFI's [Policy and program guide](#).

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## MERIT-REVIEW PROCESS

Each proposal will be evaluated according to its own merit by at least two reviewers with appropriate expertise. Reviewers will rate the degree to which the proposal meets each criterion using an assessment scale.

Applicants are instructed to address a number of aspects under each criterion standard in their proposal. Failure to address all of the aspects that apply to the proposal within each criterion should be treated as a weakness and assessed as such.

As a reviewer, you must rate the degree to which the proposal meets each criterion standard using an assessment scale (see below). The ratings must be substantiated by explaining your perceived strengths and weaknesses of the proposal for each of the assessment criteria.

The appropriateness of the budget and cost estimates should also form part of your assessment under the “infrastructure” section of the report. The budget evaluation should identify any items not adequately justified in view of the planned research activities.

It is incumbent upon the applicant to demonstrate in the proposal how the project satisfies each criterion and it should therefore be the sole information source upon which you base your review.

### Documentation and review material

Through the Reviewer dashboard on the [CFI Awards Management System \(CAMS\)](#) you will find all the documents necessary to conduct your evaluation.

To access the review materials, log into CAMS using the information provided in your CAMS activation email, and click on the name of your committee/ assignment. This will bring you to the Review and documentation section where you will find the relevant reference materials and the proposal(s) for review.

For more information on how to use the CFI reviewer portal please consult the document [Getting started with the CFI Awards Management System \(CAMS\): A guide for reviewers](#).

When you are asked to complete a written report for a single proposal, an anonymized copy of your report will be shared with the applicant institution.

To ensure that anonymity is preserved, we kindly ask that you refrain from writing any comments in your report that could reveal your identity.

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# ASSESSMENT SCALE

<b>EX</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>SW</b>	<b>PS</b>	<b>NS</b>
Significantly exceeds the criterion	Satisfies the criterion	Satisfies the criterion with only a few minor weaknesses	Partially satisfies the criterion with some significant weaknesses	Does not satisfy the criterion due to major weaknesses

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# ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

## RESEARCH OR TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

The COVID-19 research or technology development activities are innovative, feasible and timely.

- Describe the proposed COVID-19 research or technology development activities.
- Demonstrate the innovativeness and feasibility of the proposed activities by positioning them within the international context of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, describing the proposed approach and including references.

The research or technology development activities are innovative, feasible and meet international standards.

## RESEARCHERS

The researchers demonstrate excellence and leadership at a level appropriate for the stage of their career. The researchers have the expertise or relevant collaborations to conduct the research or technology development activities.

- Describe the researchers' track record, including scientific and technical expertise relevant to conduct the proposed activities.
- Describe the collaborators' and partners' contributions essential to the success of the proposed activities.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

The infrastructure is necessary and appropriate to conduct the research or technology development activities.

- Describe each item and justify its need to conduct the proposed activities. For construction or renovation, provide a description of the space including its location, size and nature. Use the item number, quantity, cost and location found in the *Cost of individual items* table. Provide a cost breakdown for any grouping of items.
- Explain why existing infrastructure within the institution and the region cannot be used to conduct the proposed activities.

## INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

The infrastructure is optimally used and sustainable through tangible and appropriate commitments over its useful life.

- Present a management plan that addresses the optimal use (e.g. user access and level of use), and the operation and maintenance (O&M) of the infrastructure.
- Provide detailed information on O&M costs and revenue sources, including institutional commitment. Refer to the *Financial resources for operation and maintenance* tables.

## BENEFIT TO CANADIANS

The research or technology development results will be transferred through appropriate pathways to potential end users and are likely to generate social, health, environmental and/or economic benefits to Canadians, including better training and improved skills for highly qualified personnel<sup>2</sup>.

- Briefly describe potential socio-economic benefits, including better training and improved skills for highly qualified personnel.
- Delineate the knowledge mobilization plan and/or technology transfer pathways, including partnerships with end users.

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<sup>2</sup> Highly qualified personnel include technicians, research associates, undergraduate students, graduate students and post-doctoral fellows.

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## **DECISION MAKING**

### **Funding decisions**

The CFI Board of Directors will make the final decision on funding for each proposal. Institutions will be notified by email when decisions and review materials are uploaded in CAMS.

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## **CFI OVERSIGHT OF MERIT-REVIEW PROCESS**

### **Role of CFI staff**

CFI staff ensures the integrity of the merit-review process by guiding the expert reviewers and committees through their review of proposals. This involves providing instructions on the CFI review process, policies and procedures, and ensuring consistency in the proposal evaluations. They are also responsible for drafting the committee reports and confirming their accuracy in consultation with the committee.

### **Collaboration with provinces**

To coordinate the review processes and avoid duplication of review efforts, the CFI will provide expert review and committee reports, along with the names and affiliations of committee members where applicable, to relevant provincial and territorial funding authorities. Disclosure of the reports will be made only in accordance with agreements between the CFI and provincial or territorial authorities, as permissible pursuant to the Privacy Act.

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# STATEMENT ON CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) must meet the highest ethical and integrity standards in all that it does in order to continue to merit the trust and confidence of the research community, the government and the public. CFI review committee members, external reviewers and observers must meet the highest standards of ethical behaviour to maintain and enhance public confidence in CFI's ability to act in the public's best interest and for the long-term public good. Where a conflict arises between private and public interests, review committee members, external reviewers and observers will be expected to take the necessary measures to ensure that the public interest is protected.

## Conflict of interest

A conflict of interest is a conflict between a person's duties and responsibilities with regard to the review process, and that person's private, professional, business or public interests. There may be a real, perceived or potential conflict of interest when the review committee member, external reviewer or observer:

- would receive professional or personal benefit resulting from the funding opportunity or proposal being reviewed;
- has a professional or personal relationship with a candidate or the applicant institution;
- has a direct or indirect financial interest in a funding opportunity or proposal being reviewed.

A conflict of interest may be deemed to exist or perceived as such when review committee members, external reviewers or observers:

- are a relative or close friend, or have a personal relationship with the candidates;
- are in a position to gain or lose financially/materially from the funding of the proposal;
- have had long-standing scientific or personal differences with the candidates;
- are currently affiliated with the candidates' institutions, organizations or companies—including research hospitals and research institutes;
- are closely professionally affiliated with the candidates, as a result of having in the last six years:
  - frequent and regular interactions with the candidates in the course of their duties at their department, institution, organization or company;
  - been a supervisor or a trainee of the candidates;
  - collaborated, published or shared funding with the candidates, or have plans to do so in the immediate future;
  - been employed by the applicant institution;
- feel for any reason unable to provide an impartial review of the proposal.



The CFI reserves the right to resolve areas of uncertainty and to determine if a conflict exists.

## **Disclosure and compliance measures**

Any review committee member, external reviewer or observer who becomes aware of a conflict of interest must promptly disclose the conflict to CFI staff. The CFI will determine if it constitutes a conflict of interest and what measures — such as recusal — are required. No review committee member, external reviewer or observer may participate in the review process of a proposal with which he/she is in conflict of interest. The conflict of interest depends on the role and level of involvement of a review committee member, external reviewer or observer and the size of the research team. Such disclosures and compliance measures shall be documented and retained for the record.

## **Confidentiality**

The CFI is subject to the Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act. These laws govern the collection, use and disclosure of information under the control of the federal government and certain federally funded organizations. Documentation submitted to the CFI by the applicant institution may be provided to the review committee members, external reviewers and observers. The documentation may contain personal information and confidential commercial information. By law, candidates have the right of access to the information provided by review committee members and external reviewers about their proposals. The names of external reviewers must be kept confidential to ensure they can provide an impartial review of a proposal. Review committee members' names can be released at the discretion of the CFI. Written materials used in the review process are generally made available to candidates when they are notified of the funding opportunity results.

Review committee members, external reviewers and observers must ensure that:

- all documentation and information that the CFI entrusts to review committee members, external reviewers and observers is maintained in strict confidence at all times. It must be used only for the purpose for which it was originally collected — namely, to review proposals and make funding recommendations as applicable;
- review documentation is stored in a secure manner to prevent unauthorized access. It must be transmitted using secure techniques and when it is no longer required, it must be destroyed in a secure manner. Any loss or theft of the documentation must be reported to the CFI;
- all enquiries or representations received by review committee members, external reviewers or observers about a proposal or its review must be referred to the CFI. Review committee members, external reviewers or observers must not contact the candidates for additional information or disclose matters arising from the review process to the candidates.

Additional requirements for review committee members and observers:

- Review deliberations are confidential. Comments made by review committee members during the review of proposals and the conclusions of the committee's review must never be discussed or disclosed with individuals not involved in the review process unless required by legislation or the courts.
- The identity of successful candidates and the details of the awards must remain confidential until a decision is made by the CFI and officially announced to the candidates and the public. The identities of unsuccessful or ineligible candidates are not made public and must not be divulged unless required by legislation or the courts.
- During the meeting, observers must be as unobtrusive as possible to minimize disruption and must not remove from the meeting room written notes or documentation related to reviewer assignments, ratings or reviewer comments on proposals.

### Confirmation

I have read and understood the *Conflict of interest and confidentiality agreement*. I agree to comply with the requirements of the [Conflict of interest and confidentiality policy of the federal research funding organizations](#). (Additional information can be found in procedural guidelines for the specific review process.)

I understand that any breach of this agreement will result in a review of the matter, with the CFI reserving the right to take appropriate action including, but not limited to, my removal from serving on or observing current or future CFI review committees or from serving as an external reviewer. The use of review documentation for any other purpose could result in a CFI investigation and/or report to the federal Privacy Commissioner's Office. Any action that the CFI may or may not take will not prevent a person whose privacy rights have been compromised from seeking legal action against the respondent. By signing this form, I also certify that I am not currently ineligible to apply for and/or hold funds from the CFI, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada or any other research or research funding organization worldwide for reasons of breach of policies on responsible conduct of research — such as ethics, integrity or financial management policies.

I agree to take personal responsibility for complying with these requirements.

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NAME

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

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SIGNATURE