

CANADA FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATION

John R. Evans Leaders Fund

Guidelines for reviewers – Unaffiliated stream

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Introduction

These instructions are intended for reviewers who are responsible for reviewing a proposal submitted to the John R. Evans Leaders Fund (JELF).

Note: Reviewers reviewing a proposal submitted to JELF proposal in conjunction with one of our partners should consult the [Guidelines for reviewers – Unaffiliated stream](#).

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

Program description

At a time of intense international competition, the John R. Evans Leaders Fund (JELF) is a critical strategic investment tool designed to help institutions attract and retain the very best of today's and tomorrow's researchers. The fund's name pays tribute to the outstanding contributions of John R. Evans, the first Chair of the CFI's Board of Directors.

The JELF enables a select number of an institution's excellent researchers to undertake innovative research by providing them with the foundational research infrastructure required to be or to become leaders in their field. In turn, this enables institutions to remain internationally competitive in areas of research and technology development that are aligned with their strategic priorities.

Canadian universities recognized as eligible by the CFI receive an allocation of CFI funds commensurate with funding received from the three federal research funding agencies (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada) over the last three years.

Eligible researchers

Up to three 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.

Eligible infrastructure projects

Eligible projects can involve:

- The acquisition or development of research infrastructure to increase research capacity and enable innovative research activities, including workhorses (high usage equipment that routinely and dependably perform over a long period of time), and the upgrading or replacement of aging infrastructure;
- Research equipment that, while in and of itself is basic, will enable innovative research or technology development activities;
- The construction of a new building or the development of new space in an existing building (e.g. new floors, reconfiguration of existing space) only when new space is essential to house and use the eligible infrastructure requested in the proposal or when additional space to house and use other eligible infrastructure (i.e. not part of the current proposal) that is essential for the use of the requested infrastructure.

The CFI funds up to 40 percent of a project's eligible infrastructure costs. Institutions must secure the remaining 60 percent of the required funding, typically from provincial governments and other public, private and non-profit organizations.

The CFI also contributes to the operation and maintenance (O&M) costs of funded projects through its Infrastructure Operating Fund. The support allocated is equivalent to 30 percent of the CFI contribution to the capital costs of the funded project. These O&M funds do not need matching funding.

Merit-review process

The merit-review process is designed to assess whether proposals meet the JELF criteria (see below) and is tailored to the nature and complexity of the proposals. The number of assessment criteria to address depends on the amount requested from the CFI in the proposal.

- less than or equal to \$400,000

Proposals are reviewed by a minimum of two experts who provide a written report to the CFI. Should a proposal receive divergent reviews, have a proposed research plan that spans diverse disciplines or is otherwise complex, the CFI may:

- Request a teleconference with reviewers of the proposal;
 - Seek the input of an additional reviewer; and/or,
 - Seek the input of the JELF Advisory Committee.
- More than \$400,000 to \$800,000

Proposals are assessed by an expert review committee.

- The review process for proposals submitted by an institution from Québec is administered by Expert Committees under the jurisdiction of the Government of Québec following a longstanding partnership between it and the CFI.

We ask applicants 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). Please substantiate the ratings by explaining the strengths and weaknesses you perceive for each of the assessment criteria in the proposal.

The cost estimates should also form part of your assessment under the “infrastructure” section of the report. In the budget evaluation, 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, so the proposal should be the only source of information for your review.

Documents 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” page 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.

When you are invited to participate in a review committee meeting, you will be asked to submit preliminary reports on CAMS prior to the meeting. These reports help to identify areas of focus for the discussion during the meeting and help inform the Expert Committee report. They are not shared with the applicant institutions.

During the meeting, reviewers will be called upon to present their preliminary assessments. A general discussion will ensue, focusing on the criteria where there are significant discrepancies among the reviewers’ assessments. Ultimately, for each criterion, the committee must reach a consensus on:

- The degree to which the proposal satisfies the criterion standard;
- An appropriate rating for each assessment criterion;
- The strengths and weaknesses of the proposal for each assessment criterion; and,
- A funding recommendation.

After the meeting, the CFI will write a report that will be shared with the applicant institution. The names of members appear on the committee reports.

Assessment scale



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

Assessment criteria

RESEARCH OR TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

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

- Describe the proposed research or technology development activities conducted in an area of institutional priority.
- Demonstrate the innovativeness and feasibility of the proposed activities by positioning them within the national and international context, describing the proposed approach and including references.

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.

Note: For construction or renovation, a detailed cost breakdown, timeline and floor plans must be provided in a separate document as part of the finance module.

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 over its useful life.
- 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.¹

- Briefly describe potential socioeconomic 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.

¹ Highly qualified personnel include technicians, research associates, undergraduate students, graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

Decision making

Funding decisions

All funding decisions are made by the CFI Board of Directors at one of their triannual meetings. The CFI then informs applicant institutions by email when the decisions and comments are available in CAMS.

CFI oversight of merit-review process

Role of CFI staff

CFI staff guide expert reviewers and committees through the merit-review process to ensure its integrity. 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 and territories

To coordinate the review process and avoid duplication of review efforts, review materials are shared with provinces and territories in accordance with agreements between the CFI and provincial and territorial funding authorities, as permissible pursuant to the Privacy Act.

Conflict of interest and confidentiality agreement for review committee members, external reviewers and observers

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.

NAME

DATE

SIGNATURE