

CANADA FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATION

College Fund

Guidelines for the Multidisciplinary Assessment Committee

June 2026

Building partnerships between colleges
and their communities

INNOVATION

Fondation canadienne
pour l'innovation

Canada Foundation
for Innovation



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About the Canada Foundation for Innovation

With a bold, future-looking mandate, the Canada Foundation for Innovation equips researchers to be global leaders in their fields and to respond to emerging challenges. Our investments in state-of-the-art tools, instruments and facilities at universities, colleges, research hospitals and non-profit research institutions underpin both curiosity- and mission-driven research that cuts across disciplines and bridges all sectors. The research infrastructure we fund mobilizes knowledge, spurs innovation and commercialization, and empowers the talented minds of a new generation.

[The Canada Foundation for Innovation respectfully acknowledges that its head office is located on the traditional, unceded territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin People.](#)



Who should use these guidelines?

These guidelines are for members of the Multidisciplinary Assessment Committee assessing proposals for the Canada Foundation for Innovation's College Fund.



A word of thanks

The Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in the review process for the College Fund. The review process relies on dedicated people like you who generously lend their time and expertise to its success. The CFI and Canada's research community greatly appreciate your efforts.

Part 1 – What you need to know about this competition

Purpose of the College Fund

The purpose of the College Fund is to support partnerships between colleges and a range of public, private or not-for-profit partners.

Through the College Fund, the CFI:

- Supports innovative projects that enhance the capacity of Canadian colleges to carry out applied research and technology development across all disciplines
- Provides colleges with research infrastructure to foster partnerships (in their strategic priority areas) with the public, private or not-for-profit sector.

The innovation generated through these research partnerships must address the social, business, health or environmental needs of a Canadian industry or community. It is expected to lead to the creation or adaptation of knowledge and technology to develop or improve a product, process or service.

The proposed activities and requested infrastructure supported through this fund should not:

- Duplicate existing services or facilities in the region
- Be used to compete with private-sector businesses.

Objectives of the College Fund

- Create and enhance partnerships with the public, private or not-for-profit sectors that lead to innovation. These innovations must address social, business, health or environmental needs of a Canadian industry or community
- Enhance and optimize the proven applied research capacity of the college that is related to the proposed applied research or technology development activities
- Generate social, economic, health or environmental benefits locally or nationally including the development of highly qualified personnel.

Competition budget

The CFI will invest up to \$15 million in research infrastructure funding and will fund up to 40 percent of a project's eligible infrastructure costs. We will also provide up to \$4.5 million for associated operating and maintenance costs through the Infrastructure Operating Fund.

Operating and maintenance costs

We will contribute to the operating and maintenance (O&M) costs of funded projects through our Infrastructure Operating Fund. The institution will automatically receive an allocation equivalent to 30 percent of the CFI contribution to funded projects.



The CFI's commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion

The CFI is committed to the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion. In all our activities, we recognize that a breadth of perspectives, skills and experiences contributes to excellence in research.

Equity: We aim to ensure all CFI-eligible institutions have the opportunity to access and benefit from our programs and CFI-funded infrastructure through our well-established, fair and impartial practices.

Diversity: We value attributes that allow institutions and their researchers — from any background and from anywhere — to succeed. This includes individual attributes such as gender, language, culture and career stage; institutional attributes such as size, type and location; and attributes that encompass the full spectrum of research, from

basic to applied and across all disciplines.

Inclusion: We encourage a culture of collaboration, partnership, contributions and engagement among diverse groups of people, institutions and areas of research to maximize the potential of Canada's research ecosystem.

We believe that nurturing an equitable, diverse and inclusive culture is the responsibility of every member of the research ecosystem, including funders, institutions, researchers, experts and reviewers.

Review process

Proposals will be evaluated in a two-stage review process, with final funding decisions made by the CFI's Board of Directors.

Figure 1: Review process



Rating scale

We use a five-point rating scale with statements about the degree to which a proposal meets each criterion standard and competitive objectives (Figure 2). Your rating must be supported by the proposal's strengths and weaknesses. We encourage you to use the full range of ratings to assess proposals, both in your preliminary assessment and when the MAC reaches a consensus on the ratings.

Figure 2: Rating scale

 EX Satisfies and significantly exceeds the criterion standard/objective in one or more aspects	 SA Satisfies the criterion standard/objective in all aspects	 SW Satisfies the criterion standard/objective with only a few minor weaknesses	 PS Partially satisfies the criterion standard/objective with some significant weaknesses	 NS Does not satisfy the criterion standard/objective due to major weaknesses
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A rating of "SA" indicates that the proposal clearly meets the objective and addresses all the instructions.

Where a proposal clearly meets the objective, addresses all the instructions and exhibits qualities or strengths that exceed what is required, you can assign a rating of "EX."

Expert review

In the first stage of review, experts review the proposals to assess their strengths and weaknesses in relation to the five assessment criteria (see Table 1).

We select expert reviewers from diverse sectors for their specific expertise in the area of the proposal. They are knowledgeable about the needs of the targeted industry or community and the college environment.

Only proposals with ratings that meet the threshold of excellence across the five assessment criteria will advance to the next stage of review. (See "What is the threshold of excellence to advance?" above.)

Multidisciplinary Assessment Committee

In the second stage of review, the Multidisciplinary Assessment Committee (MAC) assesses the proposals that met the minimum threshold of excellence at the expert review stage. We select MAC members for their broad understanding of the applied research and technology development environment, the role of colleges in the innovation process and the needs of partners.

The MAC conducts a careful analysis of the proposals and of the reports of the expert reviewers. They have two responsibilities:

- Identifying proposals that best meet the three competition objectives relative to other competing requests
- Providing a funding recommendation and funding amount for each project to the CFI Board of Directors.



What is the threshold of excellence to advance?

Proposals will meet the threshold of excellence to advance to the Multidisciplinary Assessment Committee unless they receive three or more ratings of "Satisfies the criterion standard with minor weaknesses" or one of either "Partially satisfies the criterion standard" or "Does not satisfy the criterion standard."

Use of generative artificial intelligence

Please avoid using generative AI tools in the review of proposals. Inputting proposal information into generative AI tools such as ChatGPT or DeepL, which may store and reuse the data for future enhancement of the tool, could result in breaches of privacy and the loss of custody of intellectual property and would place you in breach of our [Conflict of interest and confidentiality agreement](#). For more information, we encourage you to review and follow the Government of Canada's [Guidance on the use of Artificial Intelligence in the development and review of research grant proposals](#).

Avoiding bias

Merit review is subjective by nature. Bias can be unconscious and show up in several ways. It could be based on:

- A school of thought or ideas about fundamental versus applied or translational research, areas of research, sub-disciplines or approaches (including emerging ones)
- The size or reputation of a participating institution
- The age, language, identity factors or gender of the applicant.

We strongly encourage you to complete the [Bias in Peer Review training module](#) developed by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. This short, online module promotes understanding of bias, how it can affect merit review and ways to mitigate bias. (See "[The CFI's commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion](#).")

Official languages

The CFI offers its services in both of Canada's official languages — French and English. We must ensure that all proposals in either official language receive a full and detailed review. If you have been assigned a proposal in a language that you cannot understand, contact us immediately and we will reassign the proposal to another MAC member.



What are the assessment criteria?

Table 1: The College Fund's assessment criteria and standards

Assessment criteria	Criterion standard
Applied research or technology development	The proposed applied research or technology development activities respond to clearly identified needs of an industry or community and have been developed in collaboration with partners to ensure the research achieves the intended outcomes.
Partnerships	The institution has demonstrated its ability to build and maintain productive partnerships with an industry or community. The institution has identified partners for the planned applied research or technology development activities. The institution has a plan to stimulate new partnerships with the industry or community.
Infrastructure	The requested infrastructure is necessary and appropriate to conduct the proposed applied research or technology development activities. It enhances and integrates with the college's existing applied research capacity. The infrastructure will be optimally used and maintained to ensure continued collaborations with, and relevance to, the industry or the community.
Team	The team comprises the breadth of expertise and experience needed to conduct the proposed applied research or technology development activities and operate the requested infrastructure.
Benefits	The proposed activities are likely to lead to social, economic, health or environmental benefits at the local or national level. The proposed activities will enable the development of highly qualified personnel.

Funding decisions

The CFI Board of Directors will make funding decisions for this competition annually at its March meeting.

Principles of merit review

Our merit-review process is governed by the underlying principles of integrity and confidentiality. This is to ensure that we continue to have the trust and confidence of the research community, the government and the public. All MAC members must follow our [Conflict of interest and confidentiality agreement](#).

Integrity

We expect reviewers to maintain the highest standards of ethics and integrity. This means that personal interests must never influence, or be seen to influence, the outcome. You are appointed as an individual, not as an advocate or representative of your discipline(s) or organization. If you have a conflict of interest, you should declare it to the CFI. We will determine if the conflict of interest is manageable or if we must withdraw your invitation to be a reviewer.

Confidentiality

Our review process is confidential. When you agree to review for the CFI, you are bound by our [confidentiality agreement](#). This means that everything we send you is confidential and must be treated as such at all times. You must not discuss or share proposals with anyone. If you do not think you have the expertise to provide a useful review without discussing it with a colleague, you should decline the invitation.

Part 2 – How to conduct your review

Tools to conduct your review

Use the [CFI Awards Management System \(CAMS\)](#) to access the documents and information you need to conduct your review. We will create a CAMS account for you once you have accepted to participate in the review process. If you already have a CAMS account, you can use it to access the review materials for this competition.

CAMS is divided into dashboards for different types of users. The “Reviewer dashboard” is where you will access the review materials and conduct your preliminary assessments.

Consult [Getting started with CAMS: A guide for reviewers](#) for more information on using CAMS.

Multidisciplinary Assessment Committee roles and responsibilities

Chair

The Chair is responsible for leading the MAC meeting, ensuring that it runs effectively and that the committee:

- Considers the views of all members
- Reviews all proposals fairly, consistently and according to the guidelines in this document
- Discusses each proposal in sufficient detail
- Achieves a consensus rating for each objective
- Sufficiently substantiates the ratings so CFI staff can prepare the draft committee report.

The Chair is also responsible for ensuring that the MAC report for each proposal accurately reflects the discussion at the meeting.

Members

The MAC will review all the proposals that met the threshold of excellence to advance, with subsets of proposals assigned to each MAC member for in-depth review. Members will be asked to submit preliminary ratings, for the projects assigned to them for in depth review, before the committee meets.

CFI staff

CFI staff members will host the meeting and draft MAC reports. Sometimes, additional CFI staff observe the MAC meeting for training purposes.

Observers

To coordinate the review processes and avoid duplication of efforts, we may invite representatives of the relevant provincial or territorial authorities, CFI staff or other funding partners, to observe the MAC meeting.

Meeting logistics

Table 2 summarizes the key activities for the MAC College Fund review process.

The MAC will meet by videoconference. We will provide instructions for connecting to the videoconferencing platform in advance of the meeting.

Table 2: Summary of key activities for the MAC

Timing	Activities
Before the meeting	<p>Committee members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activate their account and log in to the CFI Awards Management System (CAMS)• Access the review materials on the “Reviewer” dashboard• Complete the recommended Bias in Peer Review training module (See “Avoiding bias”)• Read this document (guidelines for MAC members) thoroughly• Attend the member briefing session via teleconference• Evaluate the proposals against the competition objectives• For each assigned proposal, prepare a preliminary assessment in CAMS
At the meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• CFI staff members guide the committee in reviewing each proposal• The committee discusses the strengths and weaknesses for each objectives to reach consensus on a rating. This discussion informs the MAC reports.
After the meeting	CFI staff draft MAC reports for approval by the Chair

Steps in the Multidisciplinary Assessment Committee review

Step 1 – Before the meeting

Access the review materials

Soon after the proposal deadline, you will receive an email to activate your account on the [CFI Awards Management System \(CAMS\)](#). If you already have an account, you will receive an email to notify you when the review materials are available in CAMS. Consult [Getting started with CAMS: A guide for reviewers](#) for more information on using CAMS.

To access the review materials and assessment form, simply click on the committee titled “CF MAC” to bring you to the review and documentation page. On this page you will find the relevant reference materials (e.g. Guidelines for MAC Members and CFI MAC preliminary report template, as well as key details about the meeting).

There are also two tabs on this page:

1) "Project material" tab

On this page you will find the proposals and reports of the expert reviewers.

2) "Your review" tab

The list of projects individually assigned to you will be listed in a table. Clicking on a given project number will bring you to the assessment form for this project. For each objective, you will need to select the rating that best reflects your assessment. Once you are done your assessment of the projects assigned to you, you must then submit them to the CFI by clicking on the submit button. For convenience, you will also be able to download all of your preliminary ratings into a single excel file for use at the meeting.

Pre-meeting briefing

CFI staff will maintain regular contact with MAC members by email or telephone before the meeting to ensure all members have the necessary information to conduct their review.

Once all members have activated and accessed their CAMS account, CFI staff will schedule a briefing session with all MAC members to introduce the review materials in the CAMS reviewer dashboard and to review the MAC assessment process.

Conduct your preliminary assessment

The MAC will review each proposal in the context of the three competition objectives. The three objectives are further developed in five assessment criteria as shown in the table below. The degree to which a proposal meets each of the competition objectives is evaluated using the rating scale of Figure 2.

Table 3: Competition objectives and assessment criteria

Competition objectives	Assessment criteria
<p>Objective 1: Create and enhance partnerships with the public, private or not-for-profit sectors that lead to innovation. These innovations must address social, business, health or environmental needs of a Canadian industry or community.</p>	<p>Applied research or technology development The proposed applied research or technology development activities respond to clearly identified needs of an industry or community and have been developed in collaboration with partners to ensure the research achieves the intended outcomes.</p> <p>Partnerships The institution has demonstrated its ability to build and maintain productive partnerships with an industry or community. The institution has identified partners for the planned applied research or technology development activities. The institution has a plan to stimulate new partnerships with the industry or community.</p>

<p>Objective 2: Enhance and optimize the proven applied research capacity of the college that is related to the proposed applied research or technology development activities.</p>	<p>Infrastructure The requested infrastructure is necessary and appropriate to conduct the proposed applied research or technology development activities. It enhances and integrates with the college’s existing applied research capacity. The infrastructure will be optimally used and maintained to ensure continued collaborations with, and relevance to, the industry or the community.</p>
<p>Objective 3: Generate social, economic, health or environmental benefits locally or nationally including the development of highly qualified personnel</p>	<p>Team The team comprises the breadth of expertise and experience needed to conduct the proposed applied research or technology development activities and operate the requested infrastructure.</p> <p>Benefits The proposed activities are likely to lead to social, economic, health or environmental benefits at the local or national level. The proposed activities will enable the development of highly qualified personnel.</p>

Each MAC member is expected to read all of the proposals and reports of the expert reviewers in order to be familiar enough to engage fully in the committee’s discussions. Each MAC member will be assigned a number of proposals for an in-depth review. Some of these proposals will be outside of your general area of expertise. Guided by the reports of the expert reviewers, and comparing each proposal to the others in this competition, the MAC will also determine the degree to which proposals meet each competition objective.

A lead reviewer and two other reviewers will be assigned to each proposal. The lead reviewer should be prepared to briefly (one minute) introduce the proposal. All three assigned reviewers will be expected to discuss their assessment with the MAC by highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each assigned proposal relative to the competition objectives.

Preliminary ratings of the proposals assigned to you must be completed in CAMS (see ‘Access the review materials’ section) and submitted to the CFI at least one week prior to the meeting.

Preliminary assessments will not be provided to applicants. They will only be used to help us identify areas for discussion at the meeting and to inform the MAC reports.

Step 2 – At the meeting

At the meeting, the CFI staff will make introductory remarks and explain the CFI structured merit review process. Thereafter, each proposal will be discussed in turn, allowing approximately 15 minutes per proposal. Each MAC reviewer assigned to the proposal being discussed will in turn share their preliminary assessment of the proposal before the rest of the committee shares theirs. This step will be followed by a general discussion among the entire committee.

For each proposal, the discussion will focus on the three competition objectives. Following the discussion, the committee must reach a consensus on the strengths and weaknesses of the project related to each of the three objectives. Additionally, the MAC will select a rating for each of the objectives based on the degree to which the proposal satisfies the objectives. Where there are discrepancies between the MAC’s assessment and comments in the reports of the expert reviewers, the MAC will be asked to provide a substantive explanation for the diverging assessments.

The CFI expects the MAC to be selective and to only recommend funding proposals that are of high merit and that clearly meet all three objectives. By doing so, the MAC will help the CFI Board make the most effective investments in the country’s applied research infrastructure.

Contributions from the CFI, when combined with partner funding, should cover the total eligible costs of infrastructure projects. Therefore, funding will be for the full amount unless there are ineligible (or unreasonable) costs. The MAC may also recommend reduced funding in cases where some infrastructure items are not deemed to be essential to achieve the proposed applied research objectives. When the full amount is not recommended, the MAC will need to justify the level of funding.

Step 3 – After the meeting

CFI staff draft MAC reports for approval by the Chair.