



2017 Innovation Fund

Guidelines for Expert Committees

June 2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MANDATE OF THE CANADA FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATION 4

2017 INNOVATION FUND COMPETITION 4

THE CFI MERIT REVIEW PROCESS 4

EXPERT COMMITTEE REVIEW 5

 Membership 5

 Timeline and key activities..... 5

 Meeting date and format..... 6

 Pre-meeting activities 6

 Documentation and review material..... 6

 Preliminary review process 7

 Preliminary reports 8

 Expert committee meeting 8

 Face-to-face meetings with applicants..... 8

 Post-meeting expert committee reports 8

MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE (MAC) 9

SPECIAL MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE (S-MAC) 9

FUNDING DECISIONS 9

CFI OVERSIGHT OF MERIT REVIEW PROCESS 9

 Role of CFI staff..... 9

 Official languages 9

 Collaboration with provinces..... 10

APPENDIX 1: CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY 11

APPENDIX 2: ASSESSMENT CRITERIA – QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE 12

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 that benefits Canadians. Thanks to CFI investments in state-of-the-art infrastructure, Canadian universities, colleges, research hospitals and non-profit research institutions are attracting and retaining the world's top research talent, training the next generation of researchers, supporting private-sector innovation and creating high-quality jobs that strengthen Canada's position in today's global knowledge-based economy. Read more at Innovation.ca.

2017 INNOVATION FUND COMPETITION

The CFI will invest up to \$425 million for large research infrastructure in the 2017 Innovation Fund competition. For this competition, the CFI challenges institutions to propose transformative infrastructure projects that will underpin cutting-edge research. Projects funded through this competition will support promising and innovative research or technology development in areas where Canada currently is, or has the potential to be, competitive on the global stage. The CFI will support initiatives that allow institutions and their researchers to build on established capabilities to accelerate current research and technology development or to enhance emerging strategic priority areas.

The objectives of the 2017 Innovation Fund are to enable institutions and their best researchers to:

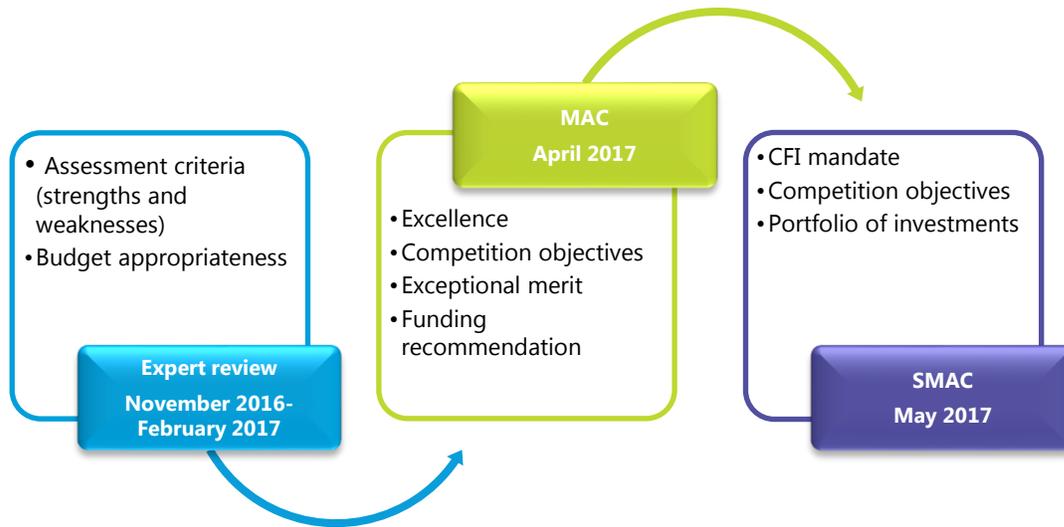
- Strive for global leadership by conducting world-class research or technology development activities in areas of strategic institutional priority;
- Enhance research capacity by forging productive partnerships within and among institutions, sectors and disciplines for the effective and sustainable use of the research infrastructure and facilities;
- Generate social, health, environmental and/or economic benefits for Canadians, including better training and improved skills for highly qualified personnel, through appropriate pathways.

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. Thus, total investment in projects funded through the 2017 Innovation Fund will exceed \$1 billion.

The CFI will invest up to an additional \$127 million to contribute to the operating and maintenance (O&M) costs of projects funded in this competition through its Infrastructure Operating Fund. The support allocated is equivalent to 30 percent of the CFI contribution to the capital costs of projects funded under the Innovation Fund. These O&M funds do not need matching funding.

THE CFI MERIT REVIEW PROCESS

The CFI structured merit review process has three stages: expert committee (EC) review, multidisciplinary assessment committee (MAC) review and a special multidisciplinary assessment committee (S-MAC) review. Figure 1 illustrates the process as well as the roles and responsibilities of each committee. This process ensures that proposals are reviewed in a fair, competitive, transparent and in-depth manner and is tailored to the nature and complexity of the proposals.



EXPERT COMMITTEE REVIEW

This first stage of the merit review process, the expert committee review, is designed to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the proposals relative to the six CFI assessment criteria. Expert committees evaluate small groups of similar or related proposals.

Membership

An expert committee is typically comprised of a Chair and two to six members, depending on the number and breadth of proposals in its purview, and is overseen by CFI staff. The Chair usually has a general background in the area of the proposals being evaluated by the committee, and the members each have specific expertise in the various aspects of the proposals. The Chair ensures that the expert committee functions effectively and objectively in accordance with CFI policies. The expert committee members evaluate the proposals based on how well they meet the assessment criteria.

The CFI expects expert committee members to maintain the highest standards of ethics in fulfilling their role. They are appointed as individuals, not as advocates or representatives of their discipline or of any organization. All expert committee members must adhere to the [Conflict of interest and confidentiality agreement](#).

Timeline and key activities

This table summarizes your key activities as an EC member as well as important dates for the 2017 Innovation Fund competition:

2017 Innovation Fund – Guidelines for Expert Committees

Pre-meeting: October 2016 to January 2017*	Access CAMS and start evaluating proposals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activate access to the CFI Awards Management System (CAMS)• Access the competition materials in the reviewer dashboard in CAMS• Evaluate the proposal(s) against the assessment criteria• Prepare a preliminary assessment using the <i>Expert reviewer preliminary report</i> template and email it to the CFI three working days prior to the meeting
Expert committee meeting: November 2016 to February 2017*	Attend meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expert committee meets to discuss and evaluate proposals. The committee assesses each criterion and identifies strengths and weaknesses for each to inform the expert committee report
Post-meeting	Finalize expert committee report(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review and approve the consensus report(s) in the weeks following the meeting

* depending on the expert committee meeting date

Meeting date and format

For expert committees evaluating up to three proposals, the committee will convene by teleconference unless the proposals are large and/or complex, necessitating an in-person meeting. Committees evaluating more than three proposals will convene in person for one to two days, depending on the number of proposals. Committee members will be advised about their meeting date, location and format by email.

Pre-meeting activities

Documentation and review material

An email will be sent to you to activate your access to the [CFI Awards Management System \(CAMS\)](#). Through the Reviewer dashboard on CAMS you will find all the documents pertaining to the committee meeting and necessary to conduct your evaluation.

To access the review materials, log into CAMS and click on the name of your committee. This will bring you to the *Review and documentation* page. On this page you will find:

- Relevant reference materials (e.g. *Guidelines for Expert Committees* and the template for the *Expert reviewer preliminary report*)
- Key details about the meeting (e.g. meeting agenda and list of individual assignments, as applicable)
- The 2017 Innovation Fund proposals for review by your expert committee. Please note that the proposals will be available by mid-October 2017.

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

Preliminary review process

In preparation for the expert committee meeting, members must read all of the proposals under the committee’s purview in order to engage fully in the discussion at the meeting. Depending on the number of proposals to be evaluated, in-depth evaluations will be conducted either by all committee members or assigned to lead reviewers for a subset of the proposals. You will be advised by email of your review assignment (i.e. all or a subset of proposals) and asked to submit preliminary review reports prior to the meeting. To assist with your preliminary review, an *Expert reviewer preliminary report* template is available on the reviewer’s dashboard.

Each proposal is evaluated on the basis of six assessment criteria (in bold in Fig. 2) that reflect the competition objectives. Each criterion has a standard against which the proposal must be assessed. As a reviewer, you must rate the degree to which the proposal meets each criterion standard using an assessment scale (bottom of Fig 2). The ratings must be substantiated in the preliminary reports by explaining (in point form or short sentences) your perceived strengths and weaknesses of the proposal in each of the assessment criteria.

Institutional capacity and track record: The proposal builds on existing capacity and track record of key investments in people and infrastructure in the area of institutional strategic priority described in the proposal.

Research or technology development: The research or technology development activities are innovative, feasible, have the potential to lead to breakthroughs, and will enhance international competitiveness.

Team: The team is composed of established or emerging leaders and has the expertise and breadth, including relevant collaborations, to conduct the research or technology development activities.

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

Sustainability: The infrastructure is optimally used within and among institutions, sectors and disciplines and is sustainable through tangible and appropriate commitments over its useful life.

Benefits 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 for Canadians.

Assessment scale

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

Figure 2: Assessment criteria, standards and scale

2017 Innovation Fund – Guidelines for Expert Committees

Applicants were instructed to address a number of aspects under each criterion standard in their proposal (see the quick reference guide in [Appendix 2](#) or the expert reviewer preliminary report template). While some aspects are optional (e.g., for projects with a construction component), 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.

The appropriateness of the budget and cost estimates should also form part of your preliminary 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 preliminary review.

Preliminary reports

The expert reviewer preliminary reports for all proposals assigned to you should be sent to the CFI in advance of the meeting. These reports help to identify areas of focus for the discussion at the time of the meeting and help inform the expert committee reports.

Expert committee meeting

At the meeting, each proposal will be discussed in turn, allowing approximately 45 minutes per proposal. Where lead reviewers are assigned, they will first share their preliminary assessments of the proposals; if there are no lead reviewer assignments, the chair will call upon members to provide their assessments. For your assigned proposals, be prepared to present a brief overview of the proposals as well as their strengths and weaknesses relative to the assessment criteria.

A general discussion will ensue, focusing on the criteria where there are significant discrepancies among the assigned members’ assessments. Ultimately, the committee must reach a consensus on the degree to which the proposal satisfies the criterion standards and appropriate rating, as well as highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal for each of the assessment criteria. The comments must substantiate the consensus assessment ratings. Note that expert committees are not asked to make funding recommendations.

Face-to-face meetings with applicants

For large and complex projects, typically requesting over \$8 million from the CFI, the expert committee review may also involve a one-hour meeting with the project leader and representatives of the applicant institution(s). Face-to-face meetings are meant to provide expert committees with an opportunity to pose questions to the applicants and to seek further clarifications, if required.

Prior to each face-to-face session, members will discuss their preliminary assessment, identify key issues that may require further clarity, and prepare a set of questions for discussion with the applicants.

Following the meeting with the applicants, the committee will resume its deliberations to reach consensus on ratings, strengths and weaknesses relative to the assessment criteria.

Post-meeting expert committee reports

A three- to five-page report is written for each proposal evaluated by the expert committee. The report includes a consensus assessment rating of each criterion substantiated by comments on the strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, reports should also contain the committee’s assessment of the budget.

Committee reports are drafted by CFI staff shortly after the meeting and finalized in consultation with the Chair. In some cases, further input may be sought from committee members on the draft report.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE (MAC)

The second stage of review involves the assessment of subsets of proposals (approximately 35) by multidisciplinary assessment committees (MAC). The proposals are grouped with others of similar size (based on total project costs) and/or complexity and one committee will only evaluate proposals from small institutions.

Guided by the expert committee reports and the MAC's analysis of the proposals, these committees are responsible for:

- Identifying proposals that best meet the standards of excellence for the competition;
- Identifying the proposals that best meet the three competition objectives — striving for global leadership, forging and fostering productive partnerships, and reaping the benefits — relative to other competing requests;
- Recommending proposals for funding and establishing the amount that should be awarded to each proposal.

To assist in the next stage of review, each MAC is also asked to identify up to two proposals of exceptional merit.

A short MAC report detailing the committee's consensus assessment of the competition objectives is written for each proposal.

SPECIAL MULTIDISCIPLINARY ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE (S-MAC)

The third stage in the process involves a review and integration of the MAC assessments by a single Special Multidisciplinary Assessment Committee (S-MAC). The S-MAC is charged with ensuring consistency among the MACs, and in instances where MAC recommendations exceed the available resources, the S-MAC recommends to the CFI Board of Directors the proposals that most effectively support the CFI's mandate, meet the objectives of the competition and represent the most effective portfolio of investments for Canada.

FUNDING DECISIONS

The CFI Board of Directors will make the final decision on funding for each proposal at its June meeting in 2017. Following this meeting, the applicant institutions will receive the funding decisions and expert committee reports, including committee memberships, and MAC reports for their proposals.

CFI OVERSIGHT OF MERIT REVIEW PROCESS

Role of CFI staff

CFI staff will maintain regular contact with committee members by email or telephone before the meeting to ensure all members have the necessary information to conduct their review. A pre-meeting briefing will be scheduled with the Chairs to discuss their roles and the expert committee review process.

CFI staff ensures the integrity of the merit review process by guiding the expert committee through its review of proposals. This involves providing instructions to the committee 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 Chair.

Official languages

The CFI offers its services in both of Canada's official languages: French and English. Committees must ensure that all proposals in either official language receive a full and detailed evaluation. The CFI should be advised if a committee member is assigned an application in an official language he or she does not understand. Typically, committee deliberations will be conducted in English.

Collaboration with provinces

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

In addition, representatives of the relevant provincial or territorial authorities will be invited to participate as observers at the expert committee review stage.

APPENDIX 1: CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY

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.

Definition

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.

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

APPENDIX 2: ASSESSMENT CRITERIA – QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Each assessment criterion is evaluated against a standard. Reviewers are asked to rate the degree to which the proposal meets each standard using the assessment scale below. In addition, comments on the strengths and weaknesses to substantiate the assessment of each criterion are required.

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

Please note that each criterion contains a number of aspects that the applicant must address in the proposal (see below). Failure to address all of the aspects (unless noted as 'if applicable') within each criterion should be treated as a weakness and assessed as such.

Institutional capacity and track record

The proposal builds on existing capacity and track record of key investments in people and infrastructure in the area of institutional priority.

! Each of the following aspects must be addressed:

1. Describe the existing capacity, including past key investments in people (researchers and highly qualified personnel) and infrastructure, on which the project builds.
2. Explain how these investments have led to research or technology development results, knowledge mobilization and technology transfer activities and/or benefits to Canadians.

Research or technology development

The research or technology development activities are innovative, feasible, have the potential to lead to breakthroughs, and will enhance international competitiveness.

! Each of the following aspects must be addressed:

1. Describe the proposed world-class research or technology development program comprising a vision, objectives and activities.
2. Demonstrate the innovativeness, feasibility and breakthrough potential of the proposed program by positioning it within the national and international context, describing the proposed approach and, where appropriate, including references.

Team

The team is comprised of established or emerging leaders and has the expertise and breadth, including relevant collaborations, to conduct the research or technology development activities.

! Each of the following aspects must be addressed:

1. Present the principal users' track records, including their most significant contributions and relevant measures of output.
 2. Highlight team members' scientific and/or technical contributions to the proposed program.
 3. Describe collaborators' and partners' contributions to the proposed program.
-

Infrastructure

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

❗ Each of the following aspects must be addressed:

1. 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.
2. Describe the availability of similar infrastructure within the institution, the region and the country.

Additional aspect to address, if applicable:

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

Note: The committee should also assess the appropriateness of the budget and cost estimates. The budget evaluation should identify any items not adequately justified in view of the planned research activities.

Sustainability

The infrastructure is optimally used within and among institutions, sectors and disciplines and is sustainable through tangible and appropriate commitments over its useful life.

❗ Each of the following aspects must be addressed:

1. Present a management plan commensurate with the project's size and complexity. The plan should address the optimal use (e.g. user access and level of use) and operation and maintenance (O&M) of the infrastructure.
2. Provide detailed information on O&M costs and revenue sources, including institutional commitment. Refer to the Financial resources for operation and maintenance tables.

Additional aspects to address, if applicable:

3. For larger and more complex projects, describe the proposed governance model, including the composition of its decision-making bodies.
4. For a multi-institutional project of three or more CFI-eligible collaborating institutions that requests an additional O&M contribution (up to five percent of the CFI award), include a justification for the additional contribution.

Benefits 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 for Canadians.

❗ Each of the following aspects must be addressed:

1. Briefly describe potential socio-economic benefits, including training of highly qualified personnel.
2. Delineate the knowledge mobilization plan and/or technology transfer pathways, including partnerships with end users, and describe the team's ability to transfer results likely to generate benefits for Canadians.



Research builds communities

La recherche au service des collectivités

450-230 Queen
Street

Ottawa ON K1P 5E4
Tel 613.947.7260

450-230 rue Queen
Ottawa ON K1P 5E4

Tél 613.947.7260
Télééc 613.943.0227