



**Background information  
and  
guidelines for reviewers**

**John R. Evans Leaders Fund**

**March 2017**

## The CFI's mission and mandate

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.

Support from the CFI enables institutions to set their own research priorities in response to areas of importance to Canada. This allows researchers to compete with the best from around the world, and helps to position Canada in the global, knowledge-based economy. The research enabled by CFI support is also creating the necessary conditions for sustainable, long-term economic growth, including the creation of spin-off ventures and the commercialization of discoveries, and supporting improvements to society, quality of life, health, the environment, and public policy.

Additional information on the CFI is available on our website at [www.innovation.ca](http://www.innovation.ca).

## Overview of the John R. Evans Leaders Fund

The John R. Evans Leaders Fund (JELF) is designed to help universities attract and retain the very best of today's and tomorrow's researchers at a time of intense international competition. The fund offers universities the opportunity to

- acquire infrastructure for their leading research faculty to undertake cutting-edge research. Additionally, the fund supports this infrastructure by providing a portion of the operating and maintenance costs, which is coupled with direct research costs from partner organizations.

The John R. Evans Leaders Fund is intended to serve the infrastructure needs of individual faculty, or small groups of up to three faculty members. In order to maximize the impact of the fund as a key strategic tool to build and enhance research capacity, the guidelines are broadened to include the acquisition, upgrading or replacement of aging workhorses. The research infrastructure must be centered on the research needs of one to three researchers but sharing of the infrastructure is encouraged provided candidates have sufficient access to carry out the proposed research program.

The candidates put forward by an institution must be recognized leaders in their field or show promise of becoming research leaders. They must be engaged in, or embarking upon, an

innovative research program for which the infrastructure is essential and will provide an enriched research environment.

Each institution receives an allocation of CFI funds commensurate with their tri-agency research funding. The institution selects the candidates and projects to put forward for one of three competitions per year. The CFI will provide funding for up to 40 percent of the eligible costs of a funded proposal; the remaining 60 percent is leveraged by the institution from other sources (provincial, local, institutional, vendors, etc.).

The CFI will also contribute to the operating and maintenance costs of approved proposals through its [Infrastructure Operating Fund](#) (IOF). The IOF allocation will be equivalent to 30 percent of the CFI funding awarded for proposals approved under the JELF and is given to the institution to distribute as it sees appropriate.

## Merit Review Process

To be considered for funding, a proposal must satisfy all six criteria to a degree commensurate with the size and complexity of the proposal. Proposals submitted to the JELF with total project costs of less than \$1 million are reviewed independently by two external reviewers. Staff at the CFI will determine the funding recommendation based on the comments received. When a discrepancy between reviewers is observed, the CFI will solicit a third opinion or will convene a multidisciplinary committee to determine the funding recommendation.

Proposals submitted to the JELF with total project costs between \$1 million and \$2 million are reviewed by a committee which typically comprises a minimum of three members with specific expertise in various aspects of the proposals. The proposals are first reviewed by each member individually and their ratings and comments are gathered using a fillable report form. A summary of each assessor's ratings for the six review factors and the budget, as well as their funding recommendation, is shared with the other committee members prior to a teleconference. During the teleconference, members of the committee are invited to discuss their ratings and assessment of the projects and to arrive at a consensus. These individual reviewer reports will not be sent to the applicant institution but will be used as reference notes during the teleconference and for the subsequent writing of a committee report.

A committee report is required for each proposal reviewed by the Expert Committee. Each one will be drafted by a CFI staff member and finalized within a few days of the teleconference, in consultation with committee members. This report documents the committee's consensus rating for each standard and the strengths and weaknesses supporting its choice. Reports will also include the committee's assessment of the finance module, including the identification of items that should be removed, if applicable, and a recommendation on whether the project should be funded.

Each criterion contains a number of points that the applicants have been asked to answer to each of which must be addressed in the proposal. Failure to address all the points within each of the review factors will weaken the proposal. The review factors are:

- Research and technology development;
- Researchers;
- Need for the infrastructure and budget justification;
- Training of HQP;
- Benefits to Canadians; and,
- Institutional commitment and sustainability.

Each criterion will be evaluated against a standard. Reviewers will be asked to rate the degree to which the proposal meets each standard, based on the information provided in the proposal. Specifically, the information will be assessed on whether the requirements for that standard are:

- Not satisfied;
- Partially satisfied;
- Fully satisfied with only a few minor weaknesses;
- Fully satisfied;
- Fully satisfied and significantly exceeded in one or more key aspects.

Reviewers are expected to substantiate the assessment by commenting on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal with regards to each standard.

## **Assessment criteria**

### **Research or technology development**

*Criterion standard: The proposed research or technology development is of high quality and originality, and meets international standards. It will create knowledge or develop technology leading to innovation.*

1. Describe the proposed research or technology development program and its innovative aspect.
2. Explain why it is important to pursue the proposed research or technology program at this time.
3. Explain how the proposed research or technology development program complements or differs from comparable programs being conducted locally, nationally and/or internationally.

## **Researchers**

*Criterion standard: Compared to researchers at the same stage in their career, the candidates demonstrate excellence and leadership.*

*The candidates have the necessary expertise and relevant collaborations in place to successfully conduct the research or technology development program proposed.*

1. Describe the expertise and ability of the candidates to lead the proposed research or technology development program.
2. Describe the technical expertise of the candidates to make the best use of the requested infrastructure.
3. Describe the existing collaborations and partnerships essential to the success of the research or technology development program.

## **Need for the infrastructure and budget justification**

*Criterion standard: The infrastructure is necessary and appropriate to conduct the research or technology development program.*

*In cases where the infrastructure will not be fully used by the candidates, the institution has developed plans to maximize its utilization within and/or outside the institution.*

1. Describe each item and justify its need to conduct the proposed research or technology development program. 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. Explain how the infrastructure will be fully utilized by the candidates and other users (if applicable).
3. Identify similar infrastructure available within the institution, the region and the country.
4. Describe the value added of an additional award in cases where a candidate has previously received a CFI award.
5. For construction or renovation, provide a description of the space including its location, size and nature.

## **Training of highly qualified personnel (HQP)**

*Criterion standard: The infrastructure requested will create or enrich an environment promoting the attraction of high-quality trainees.*

*This environment will help impart new high-level skills to HQP and adequately prepare them for careers in research or other fields.*

1. Describe how the infrastructure will enhance the current training environment for HQP in this area.
2. Describe how the infrastructure will better prepare HQP for careers in research or other fields.

## **Benefits to Canadians**

*Criterion standard: The research or technology development program has the potential to lead to tangible benefits for society, health, the economy and/or the environment.*

*There are measures in place to transfer the research results and outputs of the technology development to potential end users in a timely manner.*

1. Beyond the creation of new knowledge and the training of HQP, describe the expected benefits to Canadians and why they are significant.
2. Identify potential end users of the research or technology development results and describe the plans for knowledge mobilization and/or technology transfer.

## **Institutional commitment and sustainability**

In completing this section, applicants are asked to refer to the tables in the section entitled “Financial resources for operation and maintenance” which, for ease of reference, will be automatically appended to the end of the project module attachment for the institutional commitment and sustainability criterion.

*Criterion standard: The institution has made, and will continue to make, tangible and significant commitments in support of this area of strategic priority leading to the attraction and/or retention of key personnel.*

*The proposed infrastructure will be effectively operated and maintained for its useful life.*

1. Describe how the proposed project is of importance to the institution and the tangible contributions the institution has made or will make in support of this established area of strategic priority.
2. Describe the operating and maintenance needs of the infrastructure over its useful life.
3. Outline sources of support for operation and maintenance costs and explain the contingency plans should any of this support become unavailable.
4. Describe how the requested infrastructure will help attract and/or retain excellent researchers who will advance the institution’s capacity in this area.

Proposals submitted to the JELF are assessed by a minimum of two reviewers, each selected from the list of suggested reviewers provided by the institution or chosen by CFI staff.

Reviewers will be given access to their personal reviewer dashboard on the CFI’s secure, online awards management system (CAMS). Through CAMS, all relevant documentation is provided, including the proposal to be reviewed.

## **Funding decisions**

Following the CFI Board of Directors' meeting and the announcement of the Board's funding decisions, copies of the anonymized expert reports will be provided to the applicant institution.

## **Terms of reference for reviewers**

### **Governing principles**

Expert reviewers must adhere to the CFI's Statement on ethics, conflict of interest and confidentiality (see Appendix 2). The CFI expects the research community to not contact reviewers for information on committee deliberations. Reviewers are instructed not to discuss anything related to the review process or specific proposals with other members of the research community. They will only receive additional information or representations relating to proposals from the CFI directly, and must refer all inquiries for other material or information directed to them personally, to the CFI for response.

## **Appendix 1 - Common CFI definitions**

For all CFI funds, the following definitions apply:

### **Infrastructure**

The CFI funds projects to develop or acquire research infrastructure. It does **not** fund the conduct of research or salaries of investigators.

Infrastructure is defined as equipment, scientific collections, computer software, databases, and communication linkages used or to be used primarily for carrying on research including the housing and installations essential for the use and servicing of this infrastructure.

### **Innovation**

Innovation is a process that begins with the creation of knowledge in research, and continues through its applications, for the benefit of Canadian society.

### **Research**

Experimental or theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge of the underlying foundation of phenomena and observable facts or on new knowledge directed primarily towards a specific practical aim or objective.

### **Technology development**

Systematic work, drawing on existing knowledge gained from research and/or practical experience, which is directed to producing new materials, products or devices, to installing new processes, systems and services, or substantially improving those already produced or installed.

### **Research training**

Training of highly qualified personnel (HQP) through research, including technicians, technologists, undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and other trainees.

### **Applicant**

For all CFI awards, institutions are the applicants, not individual researchers, thus only institutions may submit applications to the JELF.

## **Appendix 2 - Statement on ethics, conflict of interest, and confidentiality**

### **Equity in the Merit Review Process**

Merit review by nature is a subjective process. Bias may manifest in several ways and could be based on a school of thought, fundamental versus applied or translational research, areas of research, sub-disciplines or approaches (including emerging ones), size or reputation of a participating institution, age, language, personal factors or gender of the applicant. To sensitize reviewer to unconscious biases they may hold, CFI cautions members against any judgment of an application based on such factors, and asks them to constantly guard against the possibility of implicit bias influencing the decision-making process. This is essential in order to ensure that all participants in the merit review process have the same base knowledge of the processes and policies in order to conduct effective and fair merit review.

### **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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date