

CANADA FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATION

# Exceptional Opportunities Fund – COVID-19 for colleges, polytechnics and Cégeps

Guidelines for Multidisciplinary Assessment  
Committee Members  
**AUGUST 2020**

**INNOVATION.CA**



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# MANDATE OF THE CANADA FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATION

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

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## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

These guidelines are for Multidisciplinary Assessment Committee members reviewing proposals submitted to the Exceptional Opportunities Fund (EOF) – COVID-19 competition for colleges, polytechnics and Cégeps.

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

In response to the current pandemic, the CFI is launching the EOF – COVID-19 competition for colleges, polytechnics and Cégeps and investing up to \$2 million with the objective of supporting urgent needs for equipment for ongoing applied research and technology development related to COVID-19. It is anticipated that the success rate will be approximately 60 percent. As an exception to our usual competitions, the CFI will cover up to 100 percent of the eligible costs of a project. However, the CFI encourages institutions to seek funding from other partners when possible, as this will broaden the scope of the initiative.

The EOF competition for colleges, polytechnics and Cégeps is open for proposals from all disciplines that can demonstrate a direct and immediate impact on current and pressing research issues related to COVID-19. To qualify for this funding opportunity, a project must meet the following requirements:

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

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

Proposals are evaluated based on the following assessment criteria:

- Research or technology development
- Researchers
- Infrastructure

### **Submission deadline**

The deadline for submitting proposals is **September 15, 2020 at 23:59 EDT**.

### **Eligible institutions**

Colleges, polytechnics and Cégeps recognized as eligible by the CFI can apply to this competition.

### **Eligible researchers**

This competition is open to participants currently engaged in applied research or technology development activities related to COVID-19 that are innovative and feasible. One to five participants, including researchers and public- and private-sector partners may be listed on the proposal.

### **Eligible infrastructure projects**

Eligible institutions can submit one proposal requesting between \$20,000 and \$50,000 from the CFI.

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

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

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

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

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

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# MERIT-REVIEW PROCESS

Each proposal will be evaluated according to its own merit by a Multidisciplinary Assessment Committee (MAC) with appropriate expertise. Reviewers will rate the degree to which the proposal meets each criterion using an assessment scale. Applicants are instructed to address a number of aspects under each criterion standard in their proposal. Failure to address all of the aspects that apply to the proposal within each criterion should be treated as a weakness and assessed as such.

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

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

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

## **Documentation and review material**

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

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

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

Each MAC member will review a subset of the submitted proposals before the meeting. At least a week before the committee meeting, please provide the CFI with your preliminary assessment ratings for each proposal that you have reviewed. This will allow the CFI to determine which projects will require more discussion during the meeting in order to reach a consensus.

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# 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

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## ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

### RESEARCH OR TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

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

- Describe the proposed applied research or technology development activities related to COVID-19.
- Demonstrate the innovativeness and feasibility of the proposed activities by positioning them within the context of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.

### RESEARCHERS

The researchers have the expertise or relevant collaborations to conduct the applied research or technology development activities.

- Describe the researchers' track record, including scientific and technical expertise relevant to conduct the proposed activities.

### INFRASTRUCTURE

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

- Describe each item and justify its need to conduct the proposed activities. 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.

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# DECISION MAKING

## **Funding decisions**

The funding recommendation will be sent to the CFI Board of Directors for a decision at its next scheduled meeting. The CFI may increase the frequency of its Board meetings to expedite the funding decision process. Institutions will be notified by email when decisions and review materials are uploaded in CAMS.

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# CFI OVERSIGHT OF MERIT-REVIEW PROCESS

## **Role of CFI staff**

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

## **Collaboration with provinces**

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

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# STATEMENT ON CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND CONFIDENTIALITY

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

## Conflict of interest

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

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

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

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

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

## **Disclosure and compliance measures**

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

## **Confidentiality**

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

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

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

Additional requirements for review committee members and observers:

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

### Confirmation

I have read and understood the Conflict of interest and confidentiality agreement. I agree to comply with the requirements of the [\*Conflict of interest and confidentiality policy of the federal research funding organizations\*](#). (Additional information can be found in procedural guidelines for the specific review process.) I understand that any breach of this agreement will result in a review of the matter, with the CFI reserving the right to take appropriate action including, but not limited to, my removal from serving on or observing current or future CFI review committees or from serving as an external reviewer.

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

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
NAME

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE