Fondation Brain Canada Foundation

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Brain Canada Foundation

2025 Future Leaders in Canadian Brain Research

Request for Applications (RFA)

About Brain Canada Foundation

Brain Canada Foundation (Brain Canada) is a national registered charity that enables and supports excellent, innovative, paradigm-changing brain research in Canada. For more than 25 years, Brain Canada has made the case for the brain as a single, complex system with commonalities across the range of neurological disorders, mental illnesses and addictions, and brain and spinal cord injuries. Looking at the brain as one system has underscored the need for increased collaboration across disciplines and institutions, and to ensure that Canada has a robust pipeline of talent to remain at the forefront in the field of brain research. Brain Canada's vision is to understand the brain in health and illness, to improve lives and achieve societal impact.

The Canada Brain Research Fund (CBRF) is an innovative arrangement between the Government of Canada, through Health Canada, and Brain Canada Foundation, designed to increase support of brain research on behalf of Canadians, and maximize the impact and efficiency of those investments. The Fund supports the very best Canadian neuroscience, fostering collaborative research and accelerating the pace of discovery, in order to improve the health and quality of life of those who suffer from brain disorders.

www.braincanada.ca

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Rationale

Supported by the Canada Brain Research Fund, the purpose of the **Future Leaders in Canadian Brain Research** program is to accelerate novel and transformative research that will fundamentally change our understanding of nervous system function and dysfunction and their impact on health. The ultimate goal is to reduce the social and economic burden of neurological and mental health illnesses through prevention, early diagnosis, and treatment.

Newly trained researchers in their first independent academic position are in a strong position to formulate innovative and impactful research projects. However, at the early stages of an investigator's career, they often lack the preliminary data and resources that are required to obtain their first large operating grant. As such, promising early-career researchers are often at a disadvantage when applying to "open" funding programs, where more established researchers tend to dominate.

The Future Leaders in Canadian Brain Research program has the potential to be transformative at a time when it is well recognized that there is a significant funding gap to support and retain our brightest early-career researchers, who are well positioned to make major contributions to Canadian brain research. By providing early-career researchers with funding at a critical point in their careers, we can build Canada's pipeline of future leaders and a foundation of research excellence and innovation.

Scope

This Program encourages innovative, unorthodox, and exploratory research that may be in the early and conceptual stages of project development but has potential for significant impact on our understanding of the brain. The data generated will enable early-career researchers to apply for larger grants that will lead to long-term projects and create innovative and sustainable research programs.

Projects should be distinct from other research projects conducted by the investigator. The research topic will focus on hypothesis-driven inquiries on the brain and nervous system, and may span the range of basic, translational, and clinical approaches, including:

- Basic research into fundamental properties and mechanisms, including functional studies based on the use of "-omics" data.
- Projects related to disease or dysfunction of the nervous system leading to new insights into fundamental biological mechanisms.
- Projects that experimentally test novel hypotheses addressing therapeutic or interventional approaches for brain disorders.
- Projects aimed at developing novel methods, if these methods allow new neuroscience questions to be answered.
- Projects, such as those using epidemiological, "-omics", or other approaches, that will generate large datasets, if hypotheses are clearly stated.

The following projects **will not** be considered for funding:

- Systematic screening approaches aimed at identifying biological components or reagents.
- Requests for operating grants.

Grant Details

The 2025 competition will support up to 20 grants of $100,000 each, over two years. Grant names may include acknowledgment of specific donors who are contributing funding for this competition.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Evidence clearly shows that increasing equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in research environments enhances excellence, innovation and creativity. Brain Canada is committed to excellence through equity and encourages applicants of diverse backgrounds to apply to our funding opportunities, which will promote the expression of diverse perspectives, approaches, and experiences, including those of underrepresented groups.

Eligibility

- This competition is open to early-career researchers. Brain Canada has implemented an extended eligibility window for early-career researcher status, in line with federal granting agencies, to account for the delays to research caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The eligibility window, which can be determined using the following table, is calculated as of the deadline for submission of Full Applications. Leaves of absence (e.g., maternity and parental leave, sick leave) will be excluded when calculating the eligibility window. For questions related to eligibility, including accounting for leaves of absence, please contact futureleaders@braincanada.ca.

Start date of first independent research position	**Status**
On or before December 31, 2022	Eligibility window extended to 84 months*
After December 31, 2022	Standard 60-month eligibility window*

*Not including leaves of absence

- Applicants must be conducting research at an eligible Canadian institution for the entire duration of the grant, and must be considered an independent researcher at their institution. Such an individual normally holds the rank of assistant or associate professor; can initiate and direct their own independent lines of research as principal investigator; has full responsibility for running their laboratories; has full control of their research funds; and is permitted to supervise trainees (if applicable, as per their institution's policy). Postdoctoral fellows or adjunct faculty are not eligible to apply.
- Academic appointments must have started by the Full Application submission deadline.
- Applicants must be able to devote a minimum of 50% of their time to research activities.
- Research applications may be related but cannot overlap with any other currently funded projects. It is the responsibility of the applicant to notify Brain Canada immediately should overlap arise from new funding awarded during the application and review process of this competition. Overlap is defined as having the same objectives and/or experimental aims as any other funded work.
- Applicants must submit a Letter of Intent in order to be eligible to submit a Full Application.
- Applicants who are currently holding, or previously received, an Azrieli Foundation Early-Career Capacity Building Grant or a Future Leaders in Canadian Brain Research Grant are not eligible to apply.

- Applicants may only submit one application per competition cycle.
- Applicants must be able to initiate the project in September 2026 when funding is expected to begin.

Use of Funds

Funds must contribute toward the direct costs of the research project for which they were awarded and should be directly attributable to the project or activity being performed.

Eligible Costs

These funds may be used to support any aspect of the research project, including:

- Salaries for technical personnel;
- Stipends of trainees;
- Supplies and materials;
- Maintenance of essential equipment and/or purchase of equipment that is currently unavailable but essential for the project;
- Provision of special services and user fees;
- Knowledge Mobilization including, but not limited to, travel of the Principal Investigator and trainees for presentation of results at conferences, publication costs in peer-reviewed and open-access journals or repositories (including article processing charges), knowledge exchange activities (workshops, brochures, books), and knowledge diffusion activities via online technologies (webinars, podcasts).

Ineligible Costs

- Salaries and consulting fees of any investigator or researcher holding an independent academic or research appointment;
- General office and lab equipment;
- Indirect costs or overhead costs associated with managing the research project.

Please note that this list is not exhaustive, and Brain Canada must be consulted on expenses that are not listed here to determine the eligibility of other categories of expenditure.

Criteria for Assessment

There will be equal weighting of the following criteria:

Innovation and Originality

Quality of the project which, while solidly based in rational scientific principles, offers new concepts and approaches, with the potential to change the paradigms of the field, open the field to new experimental directions, or address a critical barrier to progress in our understanding of the brain and nervous system.

Feasibility

The degree to which the proposed research can be successfully executed using the proposed methodology within the timeframe, budget, and resources available. Appropriate background and justification for the proposed research should be provided through literature citations and data from other sources. Preliminary data from the investigator are not required but may be included if available. The investigator's potential to successfully complete the project and to carry out innovative research based on their track record of quality training will also be considered. Feasibility is assessed not on the likelihood of success of

the proposed project, but rather on the quality of the project plan and the investigator's ability to carry out the plan as proposed.

Potential for Impact

The degree to which the new lines of research that could be developed from this project have the potential for long-term impact. This can include elements such as advancing knowledge, opening new lines of discovery, building capacity, informing decision making, health impacts, methodological/technological advances, and broad economic and social impacts. Impacts may be for specific communities with implications for a broader context, or on a larger scale. In addition, sex- and gender-based analysis plus (SGBA+) and equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) considerations should be incorporated into the research design, as this is critically important for broadening the potential impact of the work and the potential for new knowledge to be translated into health benefits for all.

Timeline

Launch of Request for Applications	October 10, 2025
Deadline for Letter of Intent	**17:00 ET, November 7, 2025**
Invitation to Full Application	January 12-16, 2026
Deadline for Receipt of Full Applications	**17:00 ET, February 20, 2026**
Notification of Decision	June 2026
Funding Begins	September 2026

How to Apply

Please note that the *2025 Future Leaders in Canadian Brain Research* competition includes a Letter of Intent and a Full Application stage. Applicants must submit a Letter of Intent in order to be eligible to submit a Full Application. Following an administrative review by Brain Canada and external peer review of the Letters of Intent, top-ranked applications will be invited to proceed to the Full Application stage.

Letters of Intent and Full Applications must be submitted using Brain Canada's electronic grant management system, SmartSimple (https://braincanada.smartsimple.ca/s_Login.jsp). **It is the sole responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure their submission adheres to the requirements and is received by the deadlines outlined above. There will be no appeal to late submissions**. Brain Canada will acknowledge receipt of the Letters of Intent and Full Applications within two business days.

Letter of Intent

Applicant Information

The information collected under this section will not be shared in an identifiable form with public, external stakeholders (e.g., Health Canada, funding partners) or reviewers, and will have no impact on the evaluation of submitted grant applications. All responses are completely anonymized and aggregated to ensure protection of the identity of any individual. Please see Brain Canada's Privacy Policy.

Education Details

Applicant's education history, beginning with a baccalaureate degree or other professional education, and including doctoral, postdoctoral, and residency training, as applicable.

Project Summary

- Project title
- Keywords describing the research project (maximum 10 words)
- A summary of the proposed research project and its goals (maximum 300 words)
- A clear statement of the **original and innovative** features of the proposed research project. Describe any new concepts and approaches, the potential to change the paradigms of the field, open the field to new experimental directions, or address a critical barrier to progress in our understanding of the brain and nervous system (maximum 750 words).
- A description of the project's **feasibility** within the budget and timeframe. Provide appropriate background and justification for the proposed research, and describe the approaches, methods and techniques that will be used (maximum 750 words).
- A description of the project's **potential for impact** in advancing our understanding of the brain and nervous system, as well as the short- and long-term impacts of the research. Describe how sex, gender and/or other determinants of health will be taken into account in the proposed research project (maximum 750 words).
- **Certification and Signature of the Principal Investigator**. Please note that institutional signatures are not required at the Letter of Intent stage.

Optional information

- Provide names and contact information for up to three individuals, in Canada or International, who are knowledgeable in your research topic and would be able to evaluate the application. Suggested individuals should not have a conflict of interest.
- List individuals to whom the application should not be sent for review.

Brain Canada will take these and other considerations into account when establishing the composition of the external Peer Review Panel.

Full Application

The Full Application must be formatted using 12-point Times New Roman or 11.5-point Arial font, single-spaced, on a letter-size page with 1" minimum margins. Use of a condensed font and spacing is not permitted. Other fonts and font sizes are acceptable for text in tables, charts, figures, graphs and legends only, as long as it is legible when the page is viewed at 100%. *Applications received in any other format, exceeding the page limits, incomplete, or late, will be rejected.*

Project Summary

- Project title
- Keywords describing the research project (maximum 10 words)
- A summary of the proposed research project and its goals, emphasizing the innovative and original features. Include a clear statement of the major impacts of the project. (maximum 300 words)

Lay Summary (maximum 300 words)

- Suitable for publication and understandable by the general public

Proposal (maximum eight pages, including figures and legends, excluding references)
Proposals should include the following information, structured by applicant preference to best address the Criteria for Assessment outlined above:

1. The **overall objectives** to be achieved by the end of the funding period
2. The **rationale** for undertaking the study now, including:
    - The current state of research on your topic and the key knowledge gap that motivates this study
    - Clear indication of any currently funded projects that are related to this proposal; there should be a clear statement describing the distinction between these where there may or may not be perceived overlap.
    - A clear statement indicating the innovative aspects of the proposal
3. The **work plan**, including:
    - The approaches, methods and techniques that will be used to achieve the stated objectives; if applicable, outline the specific contributions of any collaborators involved in the project
    - Methods of data analysis, including statistical methods and calculations to show that the study will be adequately powered
    - Considerations of SGBA+ and EDI principles should be incorporated directly into the methodology and analysis, as appropriate
    - Potential pitfalls or obstacles, and how they will be overcome
4. **SGBA+ and EDI considerations**, including:
    - How sex and/or gender considerations will be incorporated into the work plan. Research projects proposing to use only one sex or gender should provide strong justification from the scientific literature or preliminary data to support this decision. Applicants are encouraged to review CIHR's Online Training Modules for Integrating Sex and Gender in Health Research.
    - How EDI is considered in the research design in all stages of the research process including identification of the research question(s), study design and population groups, methodology, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, identification of stakeholders, and knowledge mobilization.
5. The **expected outputs** from the study, and how findings will be disseminated, including:
    - How the outcomes from the study will advance knowledge on the properties and mechanisms of the brain and nervous system
    - Plans for making the data from the project available to other qualified researchers
    - Knowledge mobilization plan describing the intended target audiences for the findings, plans for dissemination and stakeholder engagement toward achieving research impact, and how the findings may be adapted and shared with broader knowledge users. Applicants are encouraged to visit CIHR's Guide to Knowledge Translation Planning.
    - The expected broad impacts of the results - refer to the six main categories of research impacts: advancing knowledge, building capacity, informing decision-making, health impacts, and broad social and economic impacts.
6. The **role of trainees** in the project and the unique learning opportunities they will experience, if applicable.

Timeline and Anticipated Milestones
Please indicate the key intermediate stages in achieving the overall objectives, and the projected timeline for achieving them. A template will be provided at the Full Application stage.

Institutional Approvals (maximum one page)
Please outline what applicable approvals you will have in place for the Full Application deadline, and timeline for any addendums or additional approvals specific to the proposal that may need to be added thereafter. Please note that, if awarded, applicants will be required to provide documentation, where applicable, demonstrating institutional approvals and compliance with policies on the ethical use of human subjects, animals, and biohazards prior to funding release.

Biographical Information
A biographical sketch (maximum four pages) of the Principal Investigator must be submitted. A template will be provided at the Full Application stage.

Letters of Support from Collaborators
Applicants can submit up to two letters of support (maximum one page per letter) from project collaborators, if applicable. The letter(s) will explain the nature of the collaboration and outline the specific contributions and role of the collaborators in the proposed research project.

Budget
Using the template provided, applicants must submit a yearly budget and a written budget justification (maximum one page) describing the proposed costs in each category of expenditure. Please provide sufficient information to allow reviewers to assess the suitability of the cost allocation. Please ensure your budget uses the full $100,000.

Certification and Signatures
All signatures must be submitted along with the application by the Full Application submission deadline

- Signature of the Principal Investigator
- Institutional Signature: Signature of the responsible official of the institution where the Principal Investigator will conduct the research

Review Process

Letters of Intent and Full Applications will be reviewed and scored by an external Peer Review Panel composed of researchers from Canadian and international institutions with broad experience and expertise in the relevant field(s) of brain research. Brain Canada will take into account any conflicts of interest and other relevant considerations to ensure a balanced panel.

Letter of Intent
Letters of Intent submitted by the deadline will undergo an administrative check to ensure all eligibility criteria are met. Eligible LOIs will be reviewed by at least two members of the external Peer Review Panel, and the top-ranked applications will be invited to submit a Full Application. All applicants will receive anonymized reviewers' comments.

Full Application

Applications submitted by the deadline to apply will be reviewed by at least two members of the external Peer Review Panel with expertise in the relevant field(s).

Based on the reviewer scores, the Peer Review Panel will discuss the top applications. The Panel will recommend to Brain Canada the applications that have received a high merit score.

Applicants will receive anonymized written reviewer comments. Applicants whose applications were discussed at the Peer Review Panel meeting will additionally receive Scientific Officer notes from the proceedings. Brain Canada will not entertain appeals against the assessment of the Peer Review Panel.

Confidentiality and Ownership

Brain Canada Foundation will keep all materials submitted for this funding opportunity confidential and only share them with reviewers, Peer Review Panel members, and observers who have signed confidentiality and non-disclosure agreements.

Brain Canada does not claim ownership of intellectual property (IP) arising from the research they fund and expects that any IP arising from this funding is developed and commercialized according to the policies of the research institutions in which the research is performed.

Communications

Recipients of a *Future Leaders in Canadian Brain Research* grant must make every effort to attend events organized by Brain Canada, and present their projects, if applicable, to demonstrate the implications and importance of their research.

Contact Information

For more information, or if you have any questions regarding the application process, please contact Brain Canada at futureleaders@braincanada.ca.