

Frequently Asked Questions Canada First Research Excellence Fund (the Fund)

1. FAQs submitted since December 2014

1.1. General questions

Q. Will the FAQs be posted on the CFREF website?

A. No, the secretariat does not plan to post the FAQs on the web site. It is the responsibility of the designated contacts to distribute the information to their colleagues as they see fit. The Secretariat will update the program literature on the web site regularly and as time permits, in light of the questions received. The Secretariat will not respond to questions, from individuals other than the designated contacts, where the answer has been provided in the FAQs disseminated to institutions; please coordinate internally the dissemination of information updates and the submission of questions to the Secretariat, to avoid duplication.

Q. Is it mandatory to provide teaching relief to college professors from the college to work on research projects being funded by the grant?

A. No.

Q. When will the forms for the full application be posted?

A. The forms for the full application will be posted later in January.

Q. What is going to be the format of the forms (length, sections)?

A. The forms for the full application are still being finalized. Although the parameters are still subject to change, it is expected that form A will consist of a few tables, similar to the NOI form A, with an attachment (12 pages max) that will include the following sections:

- Vision and Commitment;
- Research Culture and Research Standards;
- An implementation Plan that outlines:
 - o how the institution will use the award and why;
 - o how the institution will make decisions regarding the allocation of the grant; and
 - o the respective roles to be played by senior management, management committees, partners, etc.;
- A risk assessment and management plan;

- an equity plan which would include performance measures, including indicators, targets, and a monitoring and course correction process; and
- a performance measurement plan, to be used as a basis for ongoing reporting, progress-monitoring and the evaluation of results during the midterm review. Performance plans should include baseline data for each indicator, as well as targets to be achieved at the various milestones of the strategy (at a minimum, targets should be identified for the mid-point and the end of the grant). Performance measurement plans are expected to include performance indicators and metrics in relation to factors such as:
 - o Evidence of global research excellence;
 - o Ability to attract and retain the best and brightest talent;
 - o Ability to mobilize knowledge for the benefit of society and the economy;
 - o Contributions to national strategic priorities; and
 - o Any other aspect that is relevant to the institutional strategy

The form for the full application Part B will consist of a form with tables, similar to the NOI Part B form, along with a 12 to 15 page attachment describing the institution's current capacity in the proposed fields, the proposed research, and other elements that will allow reviewers to assess criterion 1 – scientific merit and demonstrated capacity to lead internationally, and criterion 2 – strategic relevance to Canada.

Q. Will the review panels and selection board include representatives from colleges?

A. The approved program design calls for all institutions to compete for funding within a single, undifferentiated pool, with all proposals assessed on the basis of the same criteria. Participants in the adjudication process (reviewers, committee members) will be almost exclusively from outside Canada. They will come from a variety of sectors, including universities, other academic institutions, research institutes, government organizations, the private sector, etc. The main objective will be to enlist experts who can appropriately assess the world-leading potential of each application, regardless of which sector the reviewers come from.

1.2 Questions regarding the NOI form

Q. What is the submission date for the NOIs?

A. the NOIs must be submitted by midnight, Monday night, February 2nd.

Q. Will the Secretariat be posting information on the NOIs received at Feb 2?

A. The secretariat will make available aggregate information about the NOIs received.

Q. Will you accept any legible font for the NOI text, or do you require TimesNewRoman 12pts?

A. We will accept any legible format, as long as the maximum number of words is respected.

Q. Regarding the Notice of Intent Part A: Contact Person - should this be a senior institutional representative?

A. Yes.

Q. Regarding the research themes and disciplines section of the NOI form (Part B), should we be referring to a list of possible terms?

A. There is no list of possibilities for the research themes or disciplines. Please feel free to use the vocabulary that best suits your proposal, including items from lists provided by the three federal granting agencies and the Canada Foundation for Innovation.

Q. Which costs are expected to be included within Part A, Implementation of the institutional strategy, as compared to Part B, targeting scientific strategies? Also, are we to include there solely the university's contribution towards the institutional strategy, or is it a combination of both university contributions and CFREF funds, or just CFREF funds?

A. CFREF funding can be requested to support the implementation of the institutional strategy as a whole, separate from and complementary to funding requested to implement a scientific strategy(ies). Examples of activities that could be considered under the implementation of the institutional strategy include (but are not limited to): coordination of the various scientific strategies (if applicable), support for the governance of the initiative, support for communications activities, contribution to an international initiative that extends beyond the scope of one particular scientific strategy, etc. It is expected that the costs associated with the implementation of the institutional strategy will, by and large, fall in the indirect costs portion of any CFREF grant. It is not mandatory to request CFREF funding for the implementation of the institutional strategy.

In the NOI form, institutions must outline the funding that will be requested from the CFREF program only, to implement the institutional strategy. The full application form will request information on both the amount requested from CFREF and the contributions from either the institution or its partners.

Q. How broad should the scope of each part B be?

A. Part B of the full application is where the institution will present the information relevant to criterion 1 - Scientific merit and demonstrated capacity to lead on an international scale and criterion 2 - Strategic relevance to Canada. The intended audience for Part B is experts (scientists and researchers) in the area. Recognizing that a number of scientific strategies will be multi-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary and consequently quite broad, they should also be narrow

enough for an individual expert, who may have a very deep expertise in one discipline and a working knowledge of the peripheral areas, to assess the scientific strategy in terms of positioning of the proposed research with respect to existing national and international capacity and its potential for breakthrough impact on a global scale.

1.2 Questions regarding eligible costs and contributions from other sources

Q. Would support for seed funding be an eligible expense? For example, if a portion of the CFREF grant was set aside by the institution to conduct small, peer-reviewed competitions to engage and support new cutting-edge ideas aligned with the scientific strategy.

A: Yes, this would be an eligible expense, as long as it doesn't replace or displace the funding that is available through the granting councils' regular programming.

Q. What will be the impact of contributions from institutions or partners, or what importance will be accorded to these contributions? What percentage of the funding does the CFREF program expect to contribute towards the projects?

A. There is no requirement with regard to matching funding for a CFREF grant. However, the institution's ability to leverage other resources is one of the sub-criteria that will be used to evaluate the scientific strategies. Furthermore, the institution's willingness to commit internal resources is one of the sub-criteria that will be used to evaluate the institutional strategy.

Q. Can in-kind contributions be counted as contributions from partners?

A. yes.

Q Will the proposed research have to be conducted within Canada (field sites)?

A. There are no CFREF-specific guidelines with respect to the eligibility of field sites. Granting council policies would apply.

Q. Would justifications such as a limited Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) allocation, or the timing of an upcoming major round of CFI competition (such as Innovation Fund) be acceptable for a justification for purchasing larger equipment?

A. all requests to use CFREF funds for larger equipment will be considered on a case by case basis.

It would be a reasonable expectation on the part of the CFREF program and peer reviewers that the top priority strategic areas of focus that the institution would submit to CFREF would logically be the areas for which it would have reserved part or all of its JELF allocation (coherence with strategic plan). Consequently, a limited JELF allocation would likely not be an acceptable justification.

Timing of upcoming competitions (such as Innovation Fund) may be a justification only if it can be demonstrated that the equipment is required in a very timely fashion in order for the institution to seize a limited-time opportunity.

1.3 Questions regarding the two inaugural competitions

Q. In web page entitled “Application process,” under the section headings “Value and duration” and “Research areas,” there are references to both smaller-scale and larger-scale initiatives. Does the CFREF program have any expectations with regard to the grant amounts that might be associated to a larger-scale project and what amounts might be associated to a smaller-scale project?

A. There is no specific or fixed parameter about the scope or the amount of funding for proposals. The CFREF is quite different, both in its scope and its ambition, from the other programs offered by granting agencies. As a result, those projects with a scope that is appropriate within the context of other programs would be misdirected if they were sent to the CFREF.

On average, we expect the proposals for larger-scale initiatives to be for several tens of millions of dollars per year. The smaller-scale proposals would be less than \$10 million per year.

Q. How many CFREF grants are expected to be awarded in Competition 1?

A. Depending on the level of funds solicited, we expect to make not more than 5-10 awards in the first round?

Q. What is the distinction between the institutional strategy and the scientific strategy, particularly in instances where an institution might choose to pursue only one theme.

A. Given the anticipated size and scope of CFREF awards, it is important that the initiatives funded be integrated in and aligned with the institution’s overall vision. That is why the quality of the implementation plan is one of three criteria of the CFREF. The distinction between the institutional and scientific strategies lies in part in who will evaluate the two strategies. The institutional strategy is where the institution presents its overall vision and the different project management and governance aspects of its proposal. It presents the information that is necessary to assess criterion 3 – quality of the implementation plan. It will be assessed by generalists, e.g., senior administrators who have experience in implementing large-scale initiatives and in driving change. The scientific strategy, on the other hand, presents information that will be used to assess criterion 1 – scientific merit and capacity to lead on an international scale and criterion 2 – strategic relevance to Canada. It will be assessed by experts in the targeted research area(s), who can determine whether the proposed research is cutting edge, whether the institution already has a reputation in the field, the potential for the research results to foster innovation, etc.

Q. What can and cannot change between the NOI in competition 1 and the full application?

A. Competition 1 is intended for those institutions that already have detailed plans in place that meet the objectives of the program, i.e. a plan with clear objectives, where the research areas are precisely defined, the partners have been identified, and where the total budget requirements are clear. As such, there should be no significant changes between the NOI and

full application stage. The full application should be a validation of the information provided in the NOI, with more details for the selection process. In particular:

- New parts B, or parts B with significant changes in the areas, will not be considered.
- All major partners should be identified at the NOI stage. However the program secretariat would not remove a part B from the competition if there was a change in the partners at the full application stage, e.g., if one partner's contribution could not be solidified in time for the full application.
- The amount requested from CFREF should not differ significantly between the NOI and full application. The total amount provided by the institution, its partners and other sources should also not change significantly. The information about a breakdown of the contribution of each individual partner is only required at the time of the full application.

Note that competition 2 is intended for proposals that may not be at the stage of readiness required for Competition 1.

Q. Is it possible that a proposal from an institution with several scientific strategies might be partially funded?

A. Yes, proposals might be partially funded. For example, a decision might be made to fund only one scientific strategy (Part B) in a proposal, if the peer evaluation concludes that the other strategies being submitted are not competitive internationally. It is important to emphasize that the selection board will only recommend partial funding if it is convinced that the objectives outlined in the institutional strategy (Part A) can be attained with this partial funding. It also important to remember that submitting a proposal with more than one scientific strategy of which one or more does not meet the standards of excellence expected for CFREF might raise doubt with respect to the institution's ability to self-assess accurately and to establish objectives that are aligned with its strengths (two underlying elements to criterion 3 – quality of implementation plan).

2. FAQs circulated in December 2014

2.1 Questions of clarification

Q. What are the priority research areas with which grants under the Fund are required to align?

A. The priority research areas of the Government's renewed Science, Technology and Innovation strategy are: environment and agriculture; health and life sciences; natural resources and energy; information and communications technologies; and advanced manufacturing.

More information, including sub-areas, is available in chapter 4 "Focusing on Priorities", of the [ST&I Strategy](#), launched December 4, 2014.

Q. How do I determine if my institution is eligible?

A. The [eligibility criteria](#) for the Fund are very similar to those of the Research Support Fund (RSF) (formerly Indirect Costs Program ICP). If an institution is not eligible to receive a grant under the RSF program, it is likely not eligible to apply to the CFREF.

Q. Which expenses will be eligible? Construction? Renovation? Staff salaries? Funds to pay for research? Scholarships offered to students?

A. The details about eligible expenses are available on the program's Web page under the heading Administering a grant.

Q. Can the grant application include any indirect costs? Could the percentage being requested to cover indirect costs affect the success of the grant application?

A. A Canada First Research Excellence Fund grant can be used to cover expenses pertaining to the indirect costs of the research being supported by the grant, up to 25% of the total grant amount. The institution should specify what amount will be used to cover indirect costs in its application. The amount requested for indirect costs is not a criterion for selecting which applications will be successful.

Q. Institutions are encouraged to have partners, can these be from the private sector?

- A. Yes, an institution can propose partnerships with the private sector as part of its proposal for funding. The ability of the proposed initiative to leverage additional resources and promote knowledge mobilization through partnerships, including through partnerships with the private sector, is one of the selection criteria that will be used to assess proposals; see the [Strategic Relevance to Canada](#) criterion.

Q. Can private sector partners receive financial support through CFREF?

A. No, private sector partners cannot receive financial support through the Fund. They are expected to contribute in cash or in kind to the CFREF-funded initiatives and to self-fund their participation.

Q. Can academic and research institutions outside of Canada receive funding under CFREF?

A. No, the Fund will not award funding to institutions outside of Canada. Only Canadian postsecondary institutions that meet the [eligibility](#) requirements of one of the three federal research granting agencies may apply for and hold a Fund grant. Canadian postsecondary institutions that are recipients of a Fund grant may use the funding to support their collaboration with international partners.

2.2 Questions related to the two inaugural competitions

Q. Is there an advantage to applying to competition 1? Or to wait until competition 2?

A. No. There is no advantage to applying to competition 1 vs waiting until competition 2, or to applying to both competitions 1 and 2. Given the shorter timelines associated with competition 1, it is intended for institutions that have already developed a plan to become global leaders in one or more areas of focus, that have already engaged with potential partners, and that are able to set their plan in motion within the next six to 12 months. Given the total amount available for competition 1 (up to \$350M), a small number of proposals will be selected for funding. Competition 2, with its longer timelines and three times the total budget available as competition 1, is intended to give a larger number of post-secondary institutions the time to develop a plan of the scale, scope and level of ambition commensurate with the objectives of the program. A larger number of proposals will be selected for funding in Competition 2.

Q. Institutions are expected to submit, as part of the proposal, an institutional strategy; are these the same [Strategic Research Plans](#) required for the Canada Research Chairs program?

A. No, an institution's overall strategy for the Fund (part A) is a distinct plan. It will outline the institution's priority areas of focus to achieve global research leadership and it will demonstrate how the institution proposes to meet the specific objectives of the CFREF.

Q. Can an institution submit a proposal that aims to advance two or more unrelated areas of focus?

A. Yes. Each proposal may focus on one or more highly strategic initiatives among the institution's priority research excellence areas. The areas of focus don't have to be related. It is up to the institution to make the case, in its proposal, for the choice of research area(s), and to describe how advancing this/these would serve the institution's overall strategy for global excellence. In deciding whether to apply to the program and in selecting their focus areas, institutions are invited to keep in mind that the objective of the CFREF is to allow post-secondary institutions to further develop areas in which they already excel, "so that in those areas they become the very best institutions in the world". (quote from the Prime Minister's speech, December 4, 2014).

Q. If an institution is not successful at competition 1 is it allowed to resubmit a proposal addressing the same focus area(s) in competition 2?

A. Yes. However, to reduce the burden on the Fund's peer reviewers given that the inaugural competitions will be held in close succession, the program's management reserves the right to carry forward to Competition 2 any relevant peer review assessments from Competition 1. If, in consultation with the chairs of the review panels, management deems that a Competition 2 proposal is sufficiently similar to a proposal submitted by the same institution for Competition 1, it may decide not to solicit new external assessments for the proposal (or for the relevant parts thereof).

Q. If an institution is not successful in competition 1, is it allowed to resubmit a proposal addressing different areas in competition 2?

A. Yes.

Q. If an institution is successful at competition 1, is it eligible to apply to competition 2 to advance additional areas of focus?

A. Yes. The institution would have to demonstrate, in its proposal, that it has the capacity and the resources to successfully carry through a second ambitious institutional initiative of the scale and scope that is expected of a CFREF award, to advance the institution's overall strategy for global excellence.

Q. How will "the bar", i.e., the standard that applications must meet to be considered for funding, be established?

A. The Fund Secretariat is currently developing the detailed assessment grid, and instructions to reviewers and committee members. These will be available once Treasury Board has approved the detailed parameters of the program. It is worth noting that while the CFREF criteria are broader, some elements of specific CFREF criteria are similar to some of the criteria used by the Canada Foundation for Innovation for its Innovation Fund (e.g., institutional track record and commitment, research or technology development, and benefits to Canadians). Where there are similarities between the criteria elements, it is expected that the standard to be met for CFREF will be at least as high as the standard that must be satisfied in the context of an Innovation Fund competition (i.e., receiving a rating of EX or SA).