

CANADA FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATION

# Northern Fund

Guidelines for reviewers

June 2024

**INNOVATION**

Canada Foundation  
for Innovation

Fondation canadienne  
pour l'innovation



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## About the Canada Foundation for Innovation

With a bold, future-looking mandate, the Canada Foundation for Innovation equips researchers to be global leaders in their fields and to respond to emerging challenges. Our investments in state-of-the-art tools, instruments and facilities at universities, colleges, research hospitals and non-profit research institutions underpin both curiosity- and mission-driven research that cuts across disciplines and bridges all sectors. The research infrastructure we fund mobilizes knowledge, spurs innovation and commercialization, and empowers the talented minds of a new generation.

Cover: Research project participants (left to right), Aina Igyok, Carole-Anne Gillis, Silasie Ajaku and Jaiku Airo, study Arctic char in Lake Tasirjuarusik, Nunavik  
Source: Véronique Dubos/ArcticNet



## Who should use these guidelines?

These guidelines are for members of the Northern Fund Advisory Committee and Proposal Review Committees invited to review proposals for the Canada Foundation for Innovation's Northern Fund.



## A word of thanks

The Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in the review process for the Northern Fund. The review process relies on the dedicated people who generously lend their time and expertise to its success. The CFI and Northern research communities greatly appreciate your efforts.

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# Part 1: What you need to know about the Northern Fund

## Purpose of the Northern Fund

The Northern Fund will provide eligible institutions and organizations in Northern Canada with research infrastructure that will enhance the capacity for research projects that address the priorities of the region and its communities. These research projects will be conceived, developed, led or managed by Northern institutions, researchers and communities.

For the purposes of this funding program, the North includes Yukon, the Northwest Territories, Inuvialuit Settlement Region, Nunavut, Nunavik and Nunatsiavut. The Northern Fund augments the Government of Canada's strategic investments in Northern research and aims to strengthen Northern research capacity.

The Northern Fund is open for proposals in all research disciplines that clearly demonstrate how the research directly engages with and serves the needs of Northern communities, including First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities in the North. Proposals can be submitted any time between February 2024 and February 2028.

## Objectives of the Northern Fund

The objectives of the Northern Fund are to:

- Support research led by Northern institutions and organizations and First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities
- Augment research capacity in the North for the North
- Generate social, cultural, health, environmental or economic benefits to Northern Canada and Northern communities including the training of academic and non-academic highly qualified personnel.

## Budget for the Northern Fund

Over five years, the CFI will invest up to \$25 million in research infrastructure including funding to operate and maintain it.

The CFI will fund up to 50 percent of the eligible costs of a research infrastructure proposal; the remainder of the funds (50 percent or more) must be provided by the institution and other eligible funding partners. Eligible institutions can submit proposals with total CFI requests between \$250,000 and \$2.5 million (per proposal) to cover research infrastructure costs.

Additionally, applicant institutions can request operation and maintenance funding for the requested infrastructure. The operation and maintenance amount can be equivalent to up to 100 percent of the CFI contribution to the cost of the research infrastructure.

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**Table 1: Example of a research infrastructure proposal with a total eligible research infrastructure cost of \$5 million**

Research infrastructure cost	CFI request	Matching funds from partners
\$5 million	\$2.5 million (50% of total infrastructure cost)	\$2.5 million (50% of total infrastructure cost)
Operation and maintenance costs (from the Infrastructure Operating Fund (IOF))	CFI request	Matching funds from partners
Institutions can request an additional amount from the IOF	\$2.5 million (equivalent to 100% of CFI contribution to infrastructure request)	No partner funding is required for the IOF portion

# Review process

## Northern Fund Advisory Committee

The Northern Fund Advisory Committee will comprise members with relevant knowledge, experience and perspectives in Northern and Indigenous research. The membership will include First Nations, Métis or Inuit representation and will be created in collaboration with Northern research institutions and organizations, communities and other stakeholders.

The Northern Fund Advisory Committee has a dual mandate of:

- Assessing the proposals submitted to the Northern Fund to make funding recommendations
- Advising the CFI about the funding program's implementation and evolution.

Northern Fund Advisory Committee members are invited to serve for a three-year term.

## Proposal Review Committee

The Northern Fund is not a competition-based program, and each proposal will be assessed on its own merits. Each proposal will be reviewed by a Proposal Review Committee composed of a minimum of three reviewers: a subset of members of the Northern Fund Advisory Committee and additional experts with complementary and relevant discipline expertise, as required.

As part of the review process, the Proposal Review Committee will hold a virtual meeting with representatives of the team, the institution and partner community organization(s). This meeting will allow the committee to pose questions to the team and to gain further knowledge and understanding about the proposed project and the role(s) of the community organizations in, for example, the co-design, co-development or co-management of the proposed project.

Proposal Review Committees will assess the strengths and weaknesses of a proposal in relation to the review criteria and will formulate a funding recommendation to the CFI's [Board of Directors](#).

## Funding decisions

The CFI Board of Directors will make funding decisions for this funding program at its meetings in March, June and November every year. Following Board meetings, the CFI notifies institutions of the decisions and shares the Proposal Review Committee's reports with them.

## Review criteria

The Proposal Review Committee will assess proposals based on five review criteria that correspond to the Northern Fund's objectives. Each criterion is assessed against a standard. In the [call for proposals](#), applicant institutions were instructed to clearly present how their proposal meets each review criterion and to provide enough information for Proposal Review Committee members to assess the proposal's merits.

**Table 2: The Northern Fund’s review criteria and standards**

<b>Review criteria</b>	<b>Criterion standard</b>
Research in the North for the North	The research activities are of high relevance to Northern communities, are feasible and have been co-created, co-developed or co-managed with First Nations, Métis or Inuit communities, as appropriate.
Team	The team has the relevant knowledge and experience to conduct the research activities. First Nations, Métis or Inuit team members play meaningful and leadership roles in the research activities.
Infrastructure	The research infrastructure is necessary and appropriate and will augment research capacity in the North.
Sustainability	The research infrastructure will be well managed and efficiently used.
Benefits to Northern communities	There are clear pathways to transfer research results and/or to mobilize knowledge to residents of Northern communities including First Nations, Métis or Inuit communities and potential partners. The results are likely to lead to social, cultural, health, environmental or economic benefits to Northern Canada including the training of highly qualified personnel.

## Principles of review process

Our review process is governed by the underlying principles of **integrity** and **confidentiality**. This is to ensure that we continue to have the trust and confidence of the research community; the federal, provincial, territorial and regional autonomous governments; and Northern communities, including First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities in the North. All review committee members must follow our [Conflict of interest and confidentiality agreement](#).

### Integrity

We expect reviewers to maintain the highest standards of ethics and integrity. This means that personal interests must never influence, or be seen to influence, the outcome. If you have a [conflict of interest](#), you must declare it to the CFI. We will determine if the conflict of interest is manageable for the proposal you are invited to review or if we must withdraw your invitation to be a reviewer.

### Confidentiality

Our review process is confidential. When you agree to review for the CFI, you are bound by our [confidentiality agreement](#). This means that everything we send you is confidential and must be treated as such at all times. You must not discuss or share proposals with anyone.

### Avoiding bias

Proposal review is subjective by nature. Bias can be unconscious and show up in several ways. It could be based on:

- A school of thought or ideas about traditional versus non-traditional research methodologies and objectives, fundamental versus applied or translational research, areas of research, sub-disciplines or approaches (such as Traditional Knowledge, community-based research)
- The size or reputation of a participating institution or non-profit organization
- Identity factors, such as gender, age or language, of team members.



We strongly encourage you to complete the [Bias in Peer Review](#) training module developed by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. This short, online module promotes understanding of bias, how it can affect merit review and ways to mitigate bias.



## The CFI's commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion

The CFI is committed to the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion. In all our activities, we recognize that a breadth of perspectives, skills and experiences contributes to excellence in research.

**Equity:** We aim to ensure all CFI-eligible institutions have the opportunity to access and benefit from our programs and CFI-funded infrastructure through our well-established, fair and impartial practices.

**Diversity:** We value attributes that allow institutions and their researchers — from any background and from anywhere — to succeed. This includes individual attributes such as gender, language, culture and career stage; institutional attributes

such as size, type and location; and attributes that encompass the full spectrum of research, from basic to applied and across all disciplines.

**Inclusion:** We encourage a culture of collaboration and partnership which includes contributions from and engagement among diverse groups of people, institutions and areas of research to maximize the potential of Canada's research ecosystem.

We believe that nurturing an equitable, diverse and inclusive culture is the responsibility of every member of the research ecosystem, including funders, institutions, researchers, experts and reviewers.

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## Part 2: How to conduct your review

### Tools to conduct your review

Use the [CFI Awards Management System \(CAMS\)](#) to access the documents and information you need to conduct your review. We will create a CAMS account for you once you have accepted to participate in the review process. If you already have a CAMS account, you can use it to access the review materials.

CAMS is divided into dashboards for different types of users. The reviewer dashboard is where you will access the review materials and conduct your preliminary review. To access the review materials, click on the committee name. This will bring you to the “Review and documentation” page, where you will find:

- Reference materials (summary of the review criteria and instructions provided to applicant institutions, these guidelines, etc.)
- Meeting information (date, time and agenda)
- The proposal for review by your Proposal Review Committee
- The preliminary assessment form (under the “Your review” tab).

Consult the [“Using our awards management system \(CAMS\)”](#) page of our website for more information.

### Proposal Review Committee roles and responsibilities

#### Chair

The Chair is responsible for leading the committee meeting, ensuring that it runs effectively and that the committee:

- Considers the views of all members
- Reviews the proposal fairly, consistently and according to the guidelines in this document
- Discusses the proposal in sufficient detail
- Conducts an open and respectful virtual meeting with the representatives of the team, the institution and partner community organization(s)
- Achieves consensus on the proposal’s key strengths and weaknesses for each review criterion
- Achieves consensus on a funding recommendation
- Provides sufficient context on each criterion so CFI staff can prepare a committee report.

Following the committee meeting, the Chair is also responsible for ensuring that the committee report accurately reflects the discussion at the meeting.

#### Members

A subset of the Northern Fund Advisory Committee will be asked to participate in each Proposal Review Committee. Additional committee members, with complementary subject matter expertise, may be invited to serve on a committee to augment the expertise, knowledge or experience required for a fulsome review.

Members must read the proposal to fully participate in the Proposal Review Committee meeting, discuss the proposal’s strengths and weaknesses for each review criterion, meet with the representatives of the team, the institution and partner community organization(s) and work to reach consensus on a funding recommendation.



## CFI staff

At least one CFI staff member attends the Proposal Review Committee meeting to assist the Chair, take notes and clarify CFI policies and processes. CFI staff draft the Proposal Review Committee’s report for each proposal.

## Observers

Sometimes, additional CFI staff observe committee meetings. Also, to coordinate the review processes and avoid duplication of efforts, we may invite representatives of the relevant territorial or provincial authorities, or other funding partners, to observe Proposal Review Committee meetings.

## Meeting logistics

Proposal Review Committees will meet by videoconference. We will provide instructions for connecting to the videoconferencing platform in advance of the meetings.

**Table 3: Summary of key activities for Proposal Review Committees**

Timing	Activities
Before the meeting	<p>Committee members and Chair:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Activate their account and log in to the CFI Awards Management System (<a href="#">CAMS</a>)</li><li>• Access the review materials on the reviewer dashboard</li><li>• Complete the recommended <a href="#">Bias in Peer Review training module</a> (See “<a href="#">Avoiding bias</a>”)</li><li>• Attend a committee briefing session for members new to the Northern Fund review process</li><li>• Assess the proposal based on the review criteria</li><li>• Provide their preliminary assessment and questions to pose to the representatives of the team, the institution and partner community organization(s) to the CFI at least three days before the Proposal Review Committee meeting.</li></ul>
At the meeting	<p>The Chair guides the committee in reviewing the proposal.</p> <p>The committee discusses the proposal’s strengths and weaknesses.</p> <p>The committee meets with the representatives of the team, the institution and partner community organization(s) for a discussion and Q&amp;A.</p> <p>Based on the committee’s discussion and Q&amp;A with the team, the committee reaches consensus on the proposal’s key strengths and weaknesses for each review criterion.</p> <p>The committee reaches a consensus on a funding recommendation.</p>
After the meeting	<p>CFI staff draft the Proposal Review Committee’s report.</p> <p>The Chair reviews and approves the Proposal Review Committee report.</p>

## Steps in the Proposal Review Committee process

### Step 1 – Before the meeting

#### Proposal Review Committee briefings and training

We will prepare additional materials for how to review a proposal that may include committee briefing sessions or webinars. Access to these will be provided to you by email.

#### Access the review materials

Following your acceptance to participate in a Proposal Review Committee meeting, you will receive an email to activate your account on the [CFI Awards Management System \(CAMS\)](#). If you already have an account, you will receive an email to notify you when the review materials are available in CAMS. Consult the “[Using our awards management system \(CAMS\)](#)” page of our website for more information.

## Conduct your preliminary assessment

The materials provided must be the sole information source upon which you base your review. Applicant institutions had to demonstrate how their proposal satisfies each review criterion and justify the need for the requested research infrastructure and operation and maintenance funding.

After reading the proposal, you will:

- Identify the proposal's key strengths and weaknesses based on the review criteria
- In CAMS, enter your comments regarding the strengths and weaknesses for each review criterion in the relevant comments section.

We ask that you complete and submit your preliminary assessments at least **three days** before the committee meeting. These assessments can be submitted in CAMS or be emailed to us ([northern.fund@innovation.ca](mailto:northern.fund@innovation.ca)) using a Proposal Review Committee report template (available in the reviewer dashboard).

See "[Part 3 – Criterion standards and instructions provided to applicant institutions](#)" for further details on the requirements to meet the five criterion standards.

Preliminary assessments will not be provided to applicant institutions. They will only be used to help us identify areas for discussion at the Proposal Review Committee meeting and inform the Proposal Review Committee report.

## Compose questions for the meeting with the representatives of the team, the institution and partner community organization(s)

In addition to your preliminary assessment, we ask that you provide a short list (maximum three) of questions to ask to the team at the virtual meeting of the committee and representatives of the team, the institution and partner community organization(s). This list should be emailed to the CFI at least **three days before** the committee meeting.

The preliminary list of questions will be shared with the committee and the applicant institution prior to the committee meeting. The committee will select a subset of questions to pose to the team during the first session of the committee meeting.

## Step 2 – At the meeting

Proposal Review Committee meetings will be scheduled for three hours.

### Proposal discussion and questions for the meeting with representatives of the team, the institution and partner community organization(s) (60 minutes)

At the first session of the meeting, members will share their preliminary assessment of the proposal and compile a short list of questions for discussion with the representatives of the team, the institution and partner community organization(s). The discussion proceeds as follows:

- The Chair invites each member (order to be determined at the meeting) to highlight the proposal's key strengths and weaknesses based on the review criteria.
- Using the preliminary list of questions and the discussion of the proposal's key strengths and weaknesses, members identify a short list of questions for the team.
- The Chair assigns each committee member to pose one or more questions to the team.

### Meeting with representatives of the team, the institution and partner community organization(s) (60 minutes)

The meeting with representatives of the team, the institution and partner community organization(s) is to enable the committee to pose questions to the team and to gain further knowledge and understanding

about the proposed project and the role(s) of the community organizations (e.g., in co-design, co-development or co-management of the proposed project).

At the meeting with the team:

- The Chair moderates introductions between the committee and the representatives of the team, the institution and partner community organization(s).
- The team presents an overview of the proposal (10 minutes).
- Committee members pose questions, as assigned to them, to the team.

After meeting with the team, the committee will resume in camera to reach consensus on strengths and weaknesses relative to the review criteria.

**Reaching consensus and a funding recommendation (60 minutes)**

- The Chair invites each member to discuss the proposal’s key strengths and weaknesses based on the review criteria. This review is based on members’ preliminary assessments and discussion with the representatives of the team, the institution and partner community organization(s).
- Each criterion is discussed in turn before moving to the next criterion.
- The Chair guides the committee in reaching a consensus on key strengths and weaknesses that will form the committee’s report.
- The Chair guides the committee in reaching a consensus for a funding recommendation.

**Table 4: The three possible types of funding recommendations**

<b>Funding recommendation</b>	<b>Definition/conditions</b>
Full funding	The proposal meets all the review criteria with few or no weaknesses.
Partial funding	The proposal is fundable. However, one or more components of the requested infrastructure are not deemed appropriate or necessary for the proposed project and are not recommended for funding. These items will be removed from the recommended CFI funding amount.
No funding	The proposal has multiple, and substantive, weaknesses.

**Note:** In the event the Proposal Review Committee deems a proposal to be meritorious but with some, non-substantive, weaknesses, it may opt to postpone making a funding decision and request additional information from the applicant institution. This option will enable a committee to complete its review and decision making based on the additional information provided by the applicant institution following the meeting. This option should be used only if the committee is of the opinion that further details about a few aspects of the proposal may make it fundable.

**Step 3 – After the meeting**

**Proposal Review Committee reports**

Proposal Review Committee members are not required to draft the committee report. CFI staff draft a report for the proposal that summarizes the committee’s consensus comments and rationale for the funding recommendation. The report will list the Proposal Review Committee members’ names and affiliations, but no comments will be attributed to a single member. The Chair reviews and approves the Proposal Review Committee report. Once approved, this report will be shared with the applicant institutions(s) following the Board meeting.

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## Part 3: Criterion standards and instructions provided to applicant institutions

Applicant institutions are instructed to clearly present how their proposal meets each review criterion and to provide enough information for the committee to assess the proposal merits. The committee's review should address whether the proposal provides the information requested and meets the criterion standards.

### Research in the North for the North

**Criterion standard:** The research activities are of high relevance to Northern communities, are feasible and have been co-created, co-developed or co-managed with First Nations, Métis or Inuit communities, as appropriate.

**Proposal instructions:**

- Describe the research activities that will make use of the requested infrastructure and explain how they will accomplish the proposed goals of the research project and address the priorities of Northern communities.
- Describe the research methodologies to be employed and discuss feasibility by identifying key challenges and how the team will overcome them.
- Describe how the project is co-created, co-developed or co-managed with members of First Nations, Métis or Inuit communities, as appropriate.

### Team

**Criterion standard:** The team has the relevant knowledge and experience to conduct the research activities. First Nations, Métis or Inuit team members play meaningful and leadership roles in the research activities.

**Proposal instructions:**

- Describe the knowledge required to conduct the research activities.
- Highlight the experience, expertise and knowledge of each team member and the expected contribution they will make to conducting the research activities and/or using the requested research infrastructure.

### Infrastructure

**Criterion standard:** The research infrastructure is necessary and appropriate and will augment research capacity in the North.

**Proposal instructions:**

- Describe each requested item and explain why it is necessary for the proposed research activities. Indicate the item number (corresponding to the item number in the "Cost of individual items" table), quantity, location and costs correlated to the table. Provide a cost breakdown for any grouping of items.
- For construction or renovation projects, provide a description of the space, including its location, size and nature (e.g., wet lab, greenhouse).

## Sustainability

**Criterion standard:** The research infrastructure will be well managed and efficiently used.

### Proposal instructions:

- Describe how the infrastructure will be operated, maintained and accessed over its useful life (e.g., technical support, project management or oversight, user access policy, etc.).
- Outline the operation and maintenance costs and revenue sources over the useful life of the infrastructure.
- Include the rationale for the amount of CFI funding requested for operating and maintaining the research infrastructure (which can be an amount equivalent to up to 100 percent of the CFI contribution to the cost of the research infrastructure).
- Describe the key operation and maintenance needs and associated costs (e.g., number of personnel, their roles and salaries).
- Refer to the “Financial resources for operation and maintenance” tables in the project module of the CFI Awards Management System. The amount requested for operation and maintenance (IOF) support should be listed in the “Other” category in the “Funding sources” table.
- Describe how the ownership, control, access and possession of research data will be handled and how knowledge will be shared and accessed by the research project’s stakeholders. Refer to the [First Nations Principles of OCAP](#) (ownership, control, access and possession) listed on the website of the First Nations Information Governance Centre or the Global Indigenous Data Alliance’s [CARE principles](#) for Indigenous Data Governance.

## Benefits to Northern communities

**Criterion standard:** There are clear pathways to transfer research results and/or to mobilize knowledge to residents of Northern communities including First Nations, Métis or Inuit communities and potential partners. The results are likely to lead to social, cultural, health, environmental or economic benefits to Northern Canada including the training of highly qualified personnel.

### Proposal instructions:

- Describe the anticipated benefits of the research activities for Northern communities. Social benefits could include improved wellbeing through new policies and practices or community decision-making processes; cultural benefits may include preservation or revitalization of Indigenous languages; health benefits could be new diagnostic tools, treatments or therapeutics; environmental benefits could be monitoring of climate change impacts on Northern or remote regions, land and water conservation, pollution reduction, carbon emission reduction, or informing policies for environmental protection; and economic benefits could be new jobs, products, services or sustainable industries.
- Provide information on the academic and non-academic highly qualified personnel (HQP) that will be trained while using the infrastructure and conducting the research activities. Examples of highly qualified personnel are community-based research assistants, technicians, undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, research associates, etc. Indicate how many people will be trained and describe which skills they will acquire. Describe their potential career paths or further contributions to their communities.
- Describe the potential pathways to transfer research results and/or to mobilize knowledge to Northern communities and potential partners or users (e.g., partnerships with communities and the public or private sector, as applicable).