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TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH AWARDS 2022/23 RETINAL DEGENERATION COMPETITION GUIDE

TIMELINES

Activity	Date
Letter of intent deadline	June 2, 2022, 5pm (EST)
Notification of invitation to submit full application	August 12, 2022
Full application deadline (updated)	October 19, 2022, 5pm (EST)
Funding results announced (tentative)	April 2023
Funding start date (updated, tentative)	July 1, 2023

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Fighting Blindness Canada is launching the Transformative Research Award (TRA) program to fund strategic areas of need within vision research.

The 2022/23 competition will fund innovative and ambitious research that **will advance the development of new therapies for retinal degenerative diseases**. This competition is open to discovery, translational or clinical research.

The program is open to Canadian or international investigators, with a **budget of up to \$1.25 million over five years** per award. This competition has two stages: Letter of Intent and Full Application (by invitation only).

ABOUT FIGHTING BLINDNESS CANADA

Fighting Blindness Canada (FBC) is the largest charitable funder of vision research in Canada. We offer hope to Canadians by funding the best, most promising research that is driving treatments and cures for blinding eye diseases. fightingblindness.ca



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CONTACT US

If you have any questions about the competition please contact Larissa Moniz, Director, Research and Mission Programs at research@fightingblindness.ca

COMPETITION SCOPE

The goal of this competition is to fund innovative and ambitious research that has the potential to advance the development of new therapies for retinal degenerative diseases. It is anticipated that successful applications will have strong preliminary data supporting their hypothesis and proposed approach.

This competition will fund:

- Discovery, translational or clinical research.
- Research that could ultimately contribute to strategies to prevent or reduce of vision loss or restore vision for individuals with retinal degeneration.
 - This could include, but is not limited to, research that could lead to development of new or improved cell therapy, retinal or other prostheses, optogenetic therapy, drugs or other therapeutics.
 - We encourage applications from all areas of vision research including but not limited to, cell and molecular biology, neural circuitry, drug or treatment development and clinical trials.
- Research that has potential to impact individuals with at least one of the following eye diseases:
 - An inherited retinal disease (IRD) e.g. retinitis pigmentosa, choroideremia, Stargardt disease or Usher syndrome
 - Age-related macular degeneration (AMD): including wet or dry AMD/geographic atrophy
 - Optic nerve degeneration: e.g. glaucoma, Leber hereditary optic neuropathy (LHON)
- Research that has broad applicability to retinal degeneration or the potential to impact many individuals or multiple eye diseases may be prioritized.

This competition is not likely to fund:

- Research that is gene or mutation specific and therefore is likely to impact a small number of individuals. Gene therapies that are more “universal” and have the potential to impact multiple diseases or a large number of people will be considered for funding.
- Epidemiology, quality of life, health systems or low vision/rehabilitation research



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- Research to improve access to existing treatments
- Research into detection and diagnosis
- Research into development or improvement of surgical approaches

ELIGIBILITY

- This competition will fund research in Canada or internationally.
- Each application will have a single Principal Investigator who assumes responsibility for and is the primary contact for the application and future grant.
- Principal Investigators must hold an academic position at an accredited host institution such as a university, hospital or research institute. See Appendix A for full eligibility requirements for all team members.
- A maximum of one LOI per Principal Investigator will be permitted in this competition. An individual who is named as a Principal Investigator may be named as a Collaborator on additional LOIs/applications.

FUNDING DETAILS

This competition aims to fund up to two grants with a maximum budget of \$1.25 million each over 5 years. It is expected that the annual budget for a grant will not exceed \$250,000, however we may accommodate the needs of specific projects. The final funding envelope for this competition is subject to availability of funds.

Funding will be provided to support the direct costs of research, including supplies, salaries (see Appendix A for more details), and equipment associated with the proposed work. Equipment requests should not exceed \$75,000 in total. Higher equipment costs will be considered based on exceptional circumstances and if fully justified. Indirect costs are not eligible.

FBC does not provide overlap funding. We may consider joint funding with other funding bodies, however, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to notify us if you or your Co-Investigators receive other sources of financial support for a grant under review or once awarded.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

LOIs and Applications will be judged on the following criteria:

1. **Impact and Relevance**— the extent to which the project has the potential to advance the development of new therapeutic strategies for retinal degeneration. What unmet need



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does the project address in the research and therapeutic landscape? What is the direct and indirect potential impact that this project will have on the field and for patients?

2. **Scientific Excellence** – the extent to which the proposed research is based on a strong rationale, introduces innovative ideas, and solid hypotheses. How does this research compare to other research or strategies being carried out by other research groups?
3. **Approach and Deliverables** – Are the proposed research methods appropriate and sufficiently robust to reach the stated objectives of the project and ensure that high quality results will be generated? Is the budget appropriate and reasonable? Is the plan logical with specific deliverables identified to ensure the project’s success and completion within the proposed timeframe?
4. **Excellence of the team** – the extent to which the Principal Investigator, Co-Investigators and Collaborators have the relevant expertise and proven track record to carry out the proposed research.

FBC is committed to the highest standards of integrity in research. The major concerns are fabrication or falsification of data and plagiarism, but any action that is inconsistent with integrity is considered scientific misconduct. Applications not consistent with these standards will be disqualified from the competition and the host institution may be notified.

APPLICATION PROCESS

This competition has two stages:

1. **Letter of Intent (LOI) due June 2, 2022, 5pm EST.** Stringent selection will occur at this stage. LOIs will be evaluated by peer-review and by FBC’s Mission Investment Steering Committee based on the criteria above and to ensure alignment with FBC’s strategic priorities. Only applications with high chance of success will be invited to submit full applications.
2. **Full Application due October 19, 2022, 5pm EST.** By invitation only. Applications will be evaluated by a rigorous peer-review process based on the criteria listed above.

LETTER OF INTENT (LOI)

- To facilitate peer-review, please submit all documents in English.
- Full instructions are found on the Letter of Intent Form.
- Use black ink for text and where word limits are not specified use single-spaced text, Calibri font, pt.11



- Submit completed LOI through the “**Submit Here**” button at fightingblindness.ca/research/for-researchers/

Section	Format	Section Description
1	Letter of Intent Form	Available for download: fightingblindness.ca/research/for-researchers
2	3 pages maximum including figures; no page limits for references	Research Proposal: Describe the proposed research including significance, aims and objectives and research methods.
3	Free text, 300 words	Statement of Impact: Clearly state the potential impact of this research. How will this research advance the development of new therapeutic strategies for retinal degeneration? Which eye disease(s) does this research have the potential to impact? What unmet need does this research fill?

FULL APPLICATION

- By invitation only
- Full instructions are found on the Application Form.
- The Application Form, Budget Template and Other Funding Template can be downloaded at fightingblindness.ca/research/for-researchers
- To facilitate peer-review, please submit all documents in English.
- Use black ink for text and where word limits are not specified use single-spaced text, Calibri font, pt.11
- Submit the following as a single PDF document in the order specified through the “**Submit Here**” button at fightingblindness.ca/research/for-researchers/

Section	Format	Section Description
1	Application Form	Application Form: Electronic or scanned signatures are acceptable
2	Free text, 10 pages maximum including	Research Proposal: Should include the following information:



	figures; no page limit for references	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose: clearly describe the hypothesis and scientific need for your proposed work; Describe the significance of your expected results for the development of new therapeutic strategies for retinal degeneration. • Background: Summarise published or unpublished work relating to your research proposal; Describe how this knowledge and experience will help address the goals of the proposed project. • Research Plan: Identify research aims or objectives. For each objective include: the research question; experimental methods, techniques and analyses that will be used; refer to your own published work or indicate the availability of appropriate expertise including unpublished results or methodologies; justify the appropriateness of your experimental design. • Other: identify anticipated results and conclusions; identify anticipated challenges and potential solutions; identify potential next steps.
3	Free text, 1 page maximum	Project Timeline: Identify key activities and milestones for each part of the research plan. May be presented as a narrative or table.
4	Budget Template	Project Budget: Excel template.
5	Free text, 2 page maximum	Budget Justification: Provide justification and additional detail for the staffing and resources requested in the budget. Detail how other funding or resources received by the group contributes or adds value to the proposed research. Provide justification if any annual budget exceeds \$250,000.
6	Free text, 5 pages maximum each	CV: Maximum 5-page CV that showcases key accomplishments. We recommend using the NIH Biosketch format, but this is not mandatory. <u>Each Principal and Co-Investigator that is receiving funding should submit a CV.</u>



7	Other Funding Template	Other Funding Sources: Provide information on any grants held or applied for by Principal or Co-Investigators.
8	Free text (Optional)	Letters of support: Provide letters as needed from collaborators, institutions or partnering organizations detailing their contribution and support of this project

APPENDIX A: APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

See below for details about applicant eligibility requirements. Any question of eligibility or unusual circumstances not described will be reviewed and an assessment made by FBC. A maximum of one application per Principal Investigator is permitted. However, an individual who is named as a Principal Investigator may be named as a Collaborator on additional applications.

Host Institute

The Host Institution is the institution or organization that is responsible for receiving and administering the grant on behalf of the recipient. It will be the home institution of the Principal Investigator. Documentation of support for the Principal Investigator and the application by the Host Institution is required as part of the full application process. FBC reserves the right to determine eligibility of Host Institutions that are not located in Canada.

Principal Investigator

Each grant application can have only one Principal Investigator. The Principal Investigator is responsible for the direction of the proposed activities, assumes administrative and financial responsibility for the grant and receives correspondence related to the grant.

The Principal Investigator must hold a firm academic position which allows the individual to engage in independent research activities for the duration of the project and includes the ability to supervise trainees and publish research results. They must be based in, or formally affiliated with, an accredited Host Institution such as a university, hospital, or research institute. Graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, research associates, adjunct professors or status only appointments (except where they hold a firm academic position at another institution) or technical support staff are not eligible to be a Principal Investigator. The Principal Investigator is not eligible to receive salary support from the grant.

Applicants who do not yet hold an eligible position



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Investigators who have a firm offer of an academic position (as defined above) at an eligible Host Institution and where the appointment is not contingent on the success of a pending application, can apply as Principal Investigator provided that the position commences by the start date of the grant. In such cases, a letter of support from an appropriate authority of the host institution must be included providing clear details on the exact nature of the appointment (including title and major responsibilities), as well as the expected start date and duration of the appointment.

Co-Investigator

A Co-Investigator is a researcher who will take responsibility for particular administrative and scientific aspects of the research project. Co-Investigators must hold an academic position which allows the individual to engage in independent research activities for the duration of the project and includes the ability to supervise trainees and publish research results. This category can include Adjunct Professors or Status only appointments. Graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, research associates and technical support staff are not eligible to be Co-Investigators. Co-Investigators can request grant funding but are not eligible to receive salary support from the grant.

Collaborator

Collaborators are individuals who will make substantial contributions to the research project, such as helping with specific techniques or providing tools and reagents but are not requesting funding. Include letters of support from collaborators as needed.

Highly Qualified Personnel

Students, postdoctoral fellows, research associates, technicians and lay contributors may be included in this category. Highly qualified personnel may receive salary support from the grant.