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EARLY CAREER RESEARCH GRANT 2024 COMPETITION GUIDE

COMPETITION TIMELINES

Activity	Date
Letter of intent deadline	March 7, 2024, 5pm (EST)
Applicants informed of eligibility to submit full application	Week of March 11, 2024
Full application deadline	April 25, 2024, 5pm (EST)
Funding results announced (tentative)	September 2024
Funding start date (tentative)	October 1, 2024

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The 2024 Research Grant competition will support exceptional early career researchers with interest in **retinal (including optic nerve) degeneration**.

- The program is open to early career principal investigators from Canadian institutions with a **budget of up to \$200,000 over two years** per award.
- This competition has two stages: Letter of Intent and Full Application.
- Applications from across the spectrum of retinal research are welcome, including but not limited to discovery, translational, clinical and epidemiological research.
- The competition is open to all research related to retinal degeneration but may prioritize funding projects with potential to impact individuals with inherited retinal diseases (e.g. retinitis pigmentosa, Usher syndrome, choroideremia), age-related macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy or glaucoma.

ABOUT FIGHTING BLINDNESS CANADA

Fighting Blindness Canada 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

FUNDING DETAILS

- Grant budgets can be up to \$100,000 per year for up to two years (maximum \$200,000 per grant). While subject to budget availability, it is anticipated that up to five grants will be awarded from this competition.
- Funding should support the direct costs of research, including supplies, staff and trainee salaries (see Appendix A for more details), and equipment.
 - Equipment requests cannot exceed 5% of the requested budget. Salary support for the applicant or indirect costs are not eligible for funding.
 - Fighting Blindness Canada does not provide overlap funding. It is the responsibility of the applicant to notify us if you receive other sources of financial support for a grant under review or once awarded.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

At the time of the grant start date (October 1, 2024), applicants/Principal Investigators:

- must be early career scientists (including clinician scientists), who hold a full-time appointment at an eligible Canadian host institution* such as a university, hospital or research institute.
- must have a firm faculty appointment (minimum assistant level or equivalent) 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 and where the appointment is not contingent on the success of a pending application. Adjunct Professors or Status only appointments are not eligible to apply*.
- must be within 7 years** from the start of their first independent academic appointment.
- Applications must include a letter of commitment from the host institution guaranteeing the applicant protected time allocated to research as well as a description of available mentoring support and resources available to the applicant.
- Cannot be awarded an Early Career Research Grant and Clinician Scientist Emerging Leader Award from Fighting Blindness Canada in the same calendar year. While individuals may apply to both competitions, in the circumstance that they are successful in both, they will be awarded one award (the award of greater value).
- Can submit a maximum of one application to this competition as Principal Investigator. However, applicants may be named as a Collaborator on additional grants.

*See Appendix A for more details about host institution and applicant eligibility.



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**Justified career interruptions (career breaks and part-time working) are not included when calculating eligibility windows. These interruptions, including but not limited to parental leave, medical leave and family care will be considered and must be described in the application forms.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Applications will be judged on the following criteria:

1. **Impact and Relevance**– the extent to which the project has the potential to impact individuals impacted by retinal degeneration. What unmet need does the project address in the research and/or 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 Applicant and Team** – the extent to which the Principal Investigator and broader team have the relevant expertise and 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 **March 7, 2024, 5pm EST**. Applicants who meet the eligibility requirements will be contacted the week of March 11, 2024 and invited to submit a full application
2. **Full Application** due **April 25, 2024, 5pm EST**. Only applicants who submit an LOI and receive confirmation of their eligibility from Fighting Blindness Canada can submit a full application.



Formatting Guidelines

- To facilitate peer-review, please submit all documents in English.
- Full instructions are found on the Letter of Intent Form or Application Form which can be downloaded at fightingblindness.ca/research/for-researchers
- Use black ink for text and where word limits are not specified use single-spaced text, Calibri font, pt.11
- Submit documents **as a single PDF** in the order indicated through the “Submit Here” button at fightingblindness.ca/research/for-researchers/

Letter of Intent (LOI) due March 7, 2024, 5pm EST

Section	Format	Section Description
1	Letter of Intent Form	Letter of Intent Form: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Available for download fightingblindness.ca/research/for-researchers
2	Free text, 250 words	Research Proposal Summary: Provide a brief description of the proposed research including significance, aims and research methods.

Full Application due April 25, 2024, 5pm EST

Section	Format	Section Description
1	Application Form	Application Form: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Electronic or scanned signatures are acceptable• Available for download fightingblindness.ca/research/for-researchers
2	Free text, 7 pages maximum including figures; no page limit for references	Research Proposal: Should include the following information: <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 individuals impacted by retinal degeneration• Background: Summarise published or unpublished work relating to your research proposal. Describe how this



		<p>knowledge and experience will help address the goals of the proposed project.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Plan: Identify and describe research aims or objectives and experimental methods and 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 and 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, table, or figure.
4	Budget Template	Project Budget: Excel template available for download fightingblindness.ca/research/for-researchers
5	Free text, 1 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 contributes or adds value to the proposed research.
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.
7	2 pages maximum	Institutional Letter of support: Including description of the research environment, infrastructure, resources, mentoring and administrative support available. Must clearly identify protected research time.
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.



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APPENDIX A: APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

See below for additional details about applicant eligibility requirements. Any question of eligibility or unusual circumstances not described will be reviewed and an assessment made by Fighting Blindness Canada.

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.

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

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.



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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. Letters of support from collaborators should be included 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.