

2026 CATALYST GRANT COMPETITION COMPETITION GUIDE

KEY INFORMATION

- Scope: **Retinal** (including inherited retinal diseases, age-related macular degeneration) and **glaucoma**
- Two-stage competition: Letter of Intent + Full Application
- Maximum funding: \$200,000 over two years
- Principal Investigator must have independent position at a Canadian institution
- Application templates: fightingblindness.ca/research/for-researchers

COMPETITION TIMELINES

Activity	Date
Letter of Intent (LOI) deadline	March 12, 2026, 5:00 PM EST
Applicants informed of eligibility to submit full application	Week of March 16, 2026
Full Application deadline	April 23, 2026, 5:00 PM EST
Funding results announced (tentative)	September 2026
Funding start date (tentative)	October 1, 2026

COMPETITION FUNDER

For more than 50 years, Fighting Blindness Canada has helped shape the future of blinding eye disease research in Canada. We fund world-class research, share trusted resources, and advocate for stronger health policies to advance the understanding, prevention, and treatment of vision loss. As Canada's leading knowledge hub for vision loss, we connect lived experience with scientific discovery to turn research into real-world impact.

CONTACT

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1. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The 2026 Catalyst Grant Competition supports innovative research that improves outcomes for people affected by **retinal disease and glaucoma** spanning a range of research approaches including:

- Discovery and mechanistic studies
- Translational and preclinical development
- Clinical, epidemiological, or health systems research
- Vision loss rehabilitation or technology-based approaches

Projects that address shared mechanisms or have potential to impact multiple conditions are welcome.

Priority Areas

Fighting Blindness Canada may prioritize projects related to:

- Inherited retinal diseases (IRDs)
- Age-related macular degeneration (AMD)

Special Call: Choroideremia and Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP)

Dedicated funds are available to support exceptional proposals with relevance to individuals impacted by choroideremia or retinitis pigmentosa.

- Proposals will be evaluated on scientific merit and relevance rather than on the exclusivity of disease models used.
- Eligible projects may address shared disease mechanisms or treatment approaches provided there is a credible rationale for how the work may benefit individuals affected by these conditions.
- Examples of such work include, but are not limited to, gene-agnostic, regenerative or restorative therapy approaches.

2. FUNDING DETAILS

Grants of up to \$200,000 total over two years are available with a maximum budget of \$100,000 per year. Applications requesting less than the maximum amount are welcome. It is anticipated that six or more grants will be awarded, dependent on available funds.

Funds may support research personnel (highly qualified personnel such as trainees, research staff), consumables and supplies, and equipment purchases up to 5% of the total budget. Principal Investigator salary and indirect costs are not eligible. Fighting Blindness Canada does not provide overlap funding (e.g. duplicate support for the same aims, experiments, or personnel effort). Applicants must notify Fighting Blindness Canada if additional funding is secured for the same or overlapping work.

3. APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Eligibility is determined by Fighting Blindness Canada based on the criteria below. 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. An individual may be named as Co-Investigator on multiple applications, provided they are not listed as a Principal Investigator on another application.

Principal Investigator (PI)

Each grant application can have only one PI. The PI is responsible for the direction of the proposed activities and assumes administrative and financial responsibility for the grant.

The PI must hold an independent academic appointment (minimum Assistant Professor or equivalent) at an eligible Canadian host institution, with the ability to supervise trainees, publish independently, and manage research funds. The PI 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 at a Host Institution may apply as PI, provided the appointment is not contingent on the success of a pending application and commences by the grant start date. In such cases, a letter of support from the Host Institution must confirm the position, major responsibilities, start date and duration of the appointment.

Host Institution

The Host Institution must be a Canadian university, hospital, or research institute capable of administering research funds on behalf of the PI. As part of the full application the Host Institution must provide a letter confirming institutional support for the PI and the proposed research.

Co-Investigators

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 at a Canadian or International institution that permits independent research for the duration of the project, including 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.

Collaborators

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. Researchers based in industry or non-academic settings may participate as Collaborators but are not eligible to apply as PIs or Co-Investigators. 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 in accordance with the approved budget.

4. APPLICATION PROCESS

There are two stages to the competition. At the **letter of intent** stage, applications are assessed for eligibility and alignment, with detailed methodological review occurring at the **full application** stage. More detailed information and templates for both stages are available at fightingblindness.ca/research/for-researchers.

Stage 1: Letter of Intent (LOI)

Submit the completed LOI Template as a single PDF. The LOI Template captures key information about the proposed project and project team and supports assessment of eligibility and alignment. **Eligible applicants will be invited to submit a full application.**

Stage 2: Full Application

Submit as a single PDF including:

1. Application Template
2. Research Proposal (7 pages including figures; no limit for references), including:
 - Purpose, hypothesis, and need
 - Background and preliminary data (if available)
 - Research plan, methods, analyses
 - Anticipated results and challenges
 - Next steps and future scalability
3. Project Timeline (1 page)
4. Budget Template
5. Budget Justification (1 page)

6. CVs (maximum 5 pages per PI and Co-Investigator)
7. Optional Letters of Support

5. REVIEW PROCESS

Applications will be reviewed by a multidisciplinary scientific panel. Reviewers will evaluate proposals based on:

- **Scientific Excellence:** rationale, innovation, clarity of hypotheses, methodological rigor
- **Approach and Feasibility:** appropriateness of methods, feasibility within the timeline, clarity of deliverables
- **Impact and Relevance:** potential to improve outcomes for people affected by retinal or glaucoma-related vision loss and to generate pilot data for future funding
- **Excellence of the Applicant and Team:** expertise, track record, capacity to deliver the proposed work

Fighting Blindness Canada may consider portfolio balance across priority areas when making funding decisions, provided proposals meet established scientific merit thresholds.

Fighting Blindness Canada requires all reviewers to declare any real or perceived conflicts of interest and to recuse themselves from the assessment of applications where a conflict exists.

6. INTEGRITY AND ETHICS

Fighting Blindness Canada is committed to the highest standards of research integrity. Fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or other forms of misconduct may result in disqualification and notification of the host institution.

All research supported by Fighting Blindness Canada must adhere to the ethical and regulatory requirements of the host institution and all applicable provincial and national guidelines. It is the responsibility of the PI and host institution to ensure that all necessary approvals (e.g., human ethics, animal care, biohazard) are obtained before initiating the relevant portions of the research. Fighting Blindness Canada does not collect or review ethics certificates but may request confirmation of compliance from the host institution if needed. Funded researchers are expected to manage and share research data in accordance with institutional policies and applicable funder and journal requirements.

7. REPORTING AND ENGAGEMENT

Funded researchers will be required to submit annual progress and financial reports in accordance with Fighting Blindness Canada's reporting requirements.

Fighting Blindness Canada may invite funded researchers to share their work through Fighting Blindness Canada events, educational activities or other donor- and community-facing initiatives. Researchers are encouraged to participate in these activities where appropriate.



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