

VPR Catalyst Grants

Information Session

Research Services

Revision: August 6, 2024



UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

VPR Catalyst Grants: Agenda

- **Introduction and acknowledgement**
- **Dr. William Ghali (VPR)**
 - Overview of program and round 1
- **Dr. Lynn McIntyre (Review panel)**
 - What does 'catalytic' mean, and what is the committee looking for?
- **Dr. Hector MacIntyre (Research Services)**
 - Process/application updates for round 2
- **Q&A with review panel**
 - Raafat El-Hacha (Chair)
 - Lynn McIntyre
 - Marvin J. Fritzler
 - Barry Sanders
 - Erin Gibbs Van Brunschot

Objectives & General Information

- Intent: to catalyze **well-designed, early-stage** research initiatives
- Primary outcome: lead to incremental **substantial external funding**
- Can support exploration of new research questions or approaches that are distinct from the applicant's existing research
- Value: Up to **\$15,000** (higher requests will be considered but require **exceptional** justification)
- Duration: 6 months
- Deadlines: **3 intakes per year**
- Contact: vpr.catalyst@ucalgary.ca

VPR Catalyst Grants: Program Aims

- The VPR Catalyst Grants program asks researchers to **think boldly and strategically** about how to **maximize the impact** of downstream funding.
- Catalyst Grants will prioritize those who present a winning research context, including for example **mentorship, strong collaborators, and knowledge engagement partnerships** and **translation/mobilization strategies**.

VPR Catalyst Grants: Deadlines, Eligibility & Conditions

Annual Deadlines	Start Dates
February 1	March 1
June 1	July 1
October 1	November 1

Subject to budget availability

Eligibility and Conditions

- **Primary applicant** must hold an academic appointment at the University of Calgary (tenured and tenure-track)
- Individuals holding limited term or contingent term academic appointments are eligible provided the terms of their appointment explicitly include the expectation of independent research and the supervision of graduate students
- VPR Catalyst Grants are intended for activities that:
 - Can be completed swiftly (up to 6 months)
 - Increase competitiveness for external funding applications
- To be considered for subsequent Catalyst Grants, applicants must have completed their previous grant and submit an Outcomes Report

VPR Catalyst Grants: Criteria for successful applications

1. The extent to which the proposed area of work is compelling, and how impactful the downstream funding applications will be (to the principal investigator's career trajectory, to the university, to society).
2. The extent to which a concrete body of work is being proposed for Catalyst Funding, as a logical progression to a compelling external funding application.
3. The extent to which the proposed work is a fit for the principal investigator, and the other work that they do.
4. The extent to which the principal investigator is presenting a winning research context (i.e. presence of mentorship, strong collaborators, knowledge translation partnerships that will help advance the program).

VPR Catalyst Grants: Evaluation

- Internal review committee established by the Office of the Vice-President (Research).
- The evaluation process will be undertaken in a non-conflicted, formative manner.
- In cases where applications are not selected for funding, Research Services will provide clear direction as to how resubmissions may be improved upon and research team(s) restructured such that their chances of success are greater in future competitions.

VPR Catalyst Grants: Evaluation (continued)

- The following additional aspects will be considered in the review process:
 - Applications that include clearly documented matching funds and/or are leveraged with other contributions including in-kind contributions.
 - Applications that demonstrate the need for funding (i.e. includes only those budget items that are critical for the success of the project.).
 - Applications that lead to external grant submissions to one or more of the federal granting councils.
 - While all eligible faculty members are encouraged to apply, applications from early career researchers may be ranked higher in relation to mid-career and senior scholars. New applicants to the Catalyst Grants Program may also be ranked higher than those applicants who have received Catalyst Grant funding in the past.

VPR Catalyst Grants: Round 1 Breakdown

- 40% success rate (14 of 35 requests funded; 4 ECR and 10 regular)
- \$517,543 = total amount requested
- \$166,034 = total amount awarded
- \$11,860 = average amount awarded
- Leveraging skewed by a few large grants; among successful requests, average leveraged amount was \$17,000 if you discount the largest leveraged amount

VPR Catalyst Grants: Reviewers

- Raafat El-Hacha (Chair)
- Lynn McIntyre
- Marvin J. Fritzler
- Barry Sanders
- Erin Gibbs Van Brunschot

VPR Catalyst Grants: What does “catalytic” mean?

- Updated terms of reference:

*“Catalytic funding is distinguished from other forms of support such as start-up or bridge funding by its **brief duration** (requiring a well-crafted strategy), **highly targeted aims** (researchers identify an ambitious funding opportunity for which catalyst funding will position them for success), and **emphasis on a practical plan to leverage existing resources and contributions** (financial or in-kind).”*

VPR Catalyst Grants: General Tips/Advice

- Not all projects will fit the aims of this program. Think about why you want to apply for a Catalyst Grant rather than elsewhere.
- Concision is key – a succinct writing style is the best way to address the program criteria while deciding which details are important enough to include.
- Ambitious aims are strongly encouraged but beware exceeding the capability suggested by your and your co-applicant's profiles/achievements.
- “Early stage” of the research does not imply that proposals should not be mature/fully-formed.

VPR Catalyst Grants: General Tips/Advice

- Strong methodology is important but not sufficient to excel in this opportunity. Be sure to have a clear, compelling strategy/plan in place for obtaining funding.
 - Urgency of the project: why is it needed now, as opposed to next round, or next year?
 - What type of guidance are you looking for as an applicant to your external competition?
- Be very clear about the roles of trainees and how they are appropriate to expectations for the trainee's current level.
- If you have additional team members, be sure to explain how their contributions will be effectively utilized.

VPR Catalyst Grants: Budget Tips/Advice

- Be extremely thoughtful in building and justifying your budget. 32 of 35 requests in Round 1 were \$14,000 or more. The overall impression was that applicants were simply writing to the stated maximum level. This type of high-end distribution is not seen in major external competitions.
- For trainees covered by collective bargaining, be very clear about how the support you propose either meets or contributes to the required minimum levels, especially in the case of graduate assistantships. Consult the HR resources:
 - <https://www.ucalgary.ca/hr/hiring-managing/recruiting-and-hiring/recruit-and-hire-employee/graduate-assistants>

VPR Catalyst Grants: Budget Tips/Advice

- Clarified sources, amounts and use of matching funds in general. If such funds are pending or unconfirmed, include details that explain this. If funds are gifts or services in-kind, this needs clear confirmation and justification. Leveraged funds should generally be eligible toward the activities proposed, and it should be clear how they fit.
- Eligibility of an expenditure is not a sufficient rationale. To adequately justify a budget item, you should clearly and directly explain why the project cannot succeed without it.

VPR Catalyst Grants: Common Questions

- Should applicants be proposing/targeting lower budgets to be more competitive in this program?
 - Not arbitrarily. Lower budgets make it easier to fund more projects, however. You should request the amount necessary to successfully achieve your aims.
- Do applicants need to bring significant matching funding to the table in order to be successful?
 - Think practically about how to use resources that are available to help your external funding strategy succeed.
 - Everyone is expected to respond to the new fiscal realities, but this does not mean you must bring cash to the table. Other forms of support such as in-kind will be treated on equal footing.
- Is 1:1 (leveraged:requested) a high enough leveraging ratio to be competitive?
 - The average in the first round was higher; discounting very large leveraged grants it was between 1:1 and 2:1. 3 successful awards did not leverage any additional contributions.

VPR Catalyst Grants: Common Questions

- Should applicants include letters of support or other evidence regarding leveraged contributions, or evidence in support of other aspects of an application?
 - While not strictly required, this material is helpful. For funds held at the university, a project number is sufficient.
- Will RSO maintain a library of successful applications?
 - Generally RSO does not maintain a library of successful applications for intramural granting programs. However if individual faculties or units wish to do so on their own, this is their prerogative. RSO suggests that successful external applications are typically a superior model, however.
- How to include references?
 - Up to 1 additional page solely to list references is allowed.
- Is this program aimed at early career researchers?
 - It is open to applicants of all career stages. ECR applicants may be prioritized, however.

VPR Catalyst Grants: Application Updates

- More space for budget justification on budget form. Leveraging information now moved to submission webform.
- CV now required for primary applicant only. Reviewers appreciate an abridged CV that focuses on research achievements. Teaching and service information is not relevant. For co-applicants/team members, a 1-page team biosketch should be provided (1 page regardless of the team's size).
- Default award term set at 6 months.
- **Please note:** the current application process is a placeholder until RMS becomes operational for intramural granting programs.

Application Overview

- 1) Approvals page (until the application can be migrated to RMS);
 - U of C co-applicants ought to sign before you seek ADR/decanal approval.
- 2) Project description (not to exceed 3 pages) including a demonstrated need for funding. (The project description should emphasize the over-riding strategy of the grant proposal and downstream funding applications rather than the methodological approach).
 - 1 additional page for references is allowed.
- 3) A description (one page maximum) of how the Catalyst Grant activities will enhance the chances for success of the external funding request, taking care to address the fourth review criterion;

Application Overview (continued)

- 4) Budget and budget justification including leveraged contributions;
 - Budget form
 - Webform collects information about leveraged/matching contributions
- 5) EDI statement (one page maximum) including relevant explanations of any significant career interruptions;
- 6) Curriculum Vitae of the principal applicant (any format) and, if applicable, a team biosketch up to one page total length describing the profile and project role of each co-applicant, preceding the principal applicant's CV (co-applicant CVs should not be included).

EDI Statements

- Overall, reviewers were very impressed by the quality and thoughtfulness of the EDI statements
- The statements are not directly scored but they are relevant to evaluation of the criteria
- The central Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion is a good resource, and several faculties have developed or are developing their own resources and guides for EDI plans

VPR Catalyst Grants

Thank You!