Writing a Compelling Research Proposal

CPRA Application Lab

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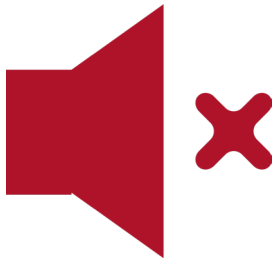
The University of Calgary, located in the heart of Southern Alberta, both acknowledges and pays tribute to the traditional territories of the peoples of Treaty 7, which include the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprised of the Siksika, the Piikani, and the Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney First Nations). The City of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta (Districts 5 and 6).

Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions (Polls)
- CPRA Overview
- Step 1: Understanding the Guidelines
  - Application Requirements
  - Understanding CPRA Selection Criteria
- Step 2: Proposal Writing as a Genre
  - Anatomy of a Strong Proposal
  - Best Practices for Proposals
  - Formulating Strong Research Questions
- Step 3: Knowing & Writing For Your Audience
  - Who reads these things anyways?
  - Strategies and tips
- FAQs and Resources

Session housekeeping guidelines (Online)



Mute your audio

Turn off your video if there is a lag

Please submit your questions in Zoom Chat.

Raise your hand if you have a question

If you experience tech issues, message

Session housekeeping guidelines (Offline)

Please silence mobile phones

Use a microphone when speaking so online participants can hear you clearly

Coffee & snacks

Poll 1: Your Current Stage in the Proposal Process

Which statement best reflects where you are in preparing your proposal?

Single Choice (select one):

- I have a near-final draft that needs polishing
- I've made a solid start but still have work to do
- I'm still shaping my ideas and haven't started writing

Online participants:
Please use link to vote: https://app.sli.do/event/vzsn3EHHsXJUyviWkukyjw

Poll 2: What agency you will apply for?

Single Choice (select one):

- SSHRC / NSERC / CIHR / Other

Online participants:
Please use link to vote: https://app.sli.do/event/9N27b3v3tWK4uU2R1HcECV

Overview: Canada Postdoctoral Research Awards (CPRA)

- The new CRTAS opened for applications in summer 2025, with deadlines varying by agency.
- Banting, SSHRC/CIHR/NSERC PDF discontinued
- The postdoctoral award (CPRA) has a duration of two years and is valued at $70,000 per year (incl. CIHR)
- Updated Evaluation Criteria and Scoring
- International applicant eligibility
- Up to 20% of all postdoctoral awards will be awarded to international applicants

Step 1: Understanding the Guidelines

Application Requirements

CIHR	NSERC	SSHRC
ResearchNET and instructions Attachments: 12pt Times New Roman 2cm margins Normal line/character spacing Unprotected pdfs	Online system and instructions Attachments: 12pt Times New Roman 1.87cm margins Normal line/character spacing Top right header: your name & page numbers Unprotected pdfs	Registration and login and instructions Attachments: 12pt Times New Roman 2cm margins Normal line/character spacing Unprotected pdfs

Proposal + Citations

CIHR	NSERC	SSHRC
Research Project Summary (1 Page) Concise hypothesis, plan, aims, methodology, and significance *References are optional and included in the 1-page limit (no separate space)* **Training Expectations** (1 Page) • Connection to past training • Development plan **Research Environment** (1 Page) • Describe the facilities & resources available	**Outline of Proposed Research** (2 Pages) Include: • Theoretical approach, methodology, and importance of work **Bibliography for application** (1 Page) **Justification of NSERC application** if applicable (1 Page)	**Program of Work** Include (4 Pages): • Connection to doctoral thesis • Theoretical approach, methodology, and importance of work • KMb + dissemination • Rationale for Tenure Location and Supervisor • 10 pg bibliography (for your proposed program + application)

CV + Most Significant Contributions

CIHR	NSERC	SSHRC
Canadian Common CV (CCV) CIHR Academic Type *see CIHR instructions for specific sections to complete **Most Significant Contributions** (2pg attachment) *up to 3 research contributions with description*	Various CV-related details are collected in the **NSERC application Form 201** **Contributions and Statements** (4pg attachment) 1. "Contributions" list 2. Most Significant Contributions (up to 3) 3. Applicant Statement *Describe professional, academic and extracurricular activities, that best demonstrate your relevant research potential and experience.*	**SSHRC Web CV** **Research Contributions** (2pg attachment) 1. Research Contributions 2. Other Contributions 3. Most Significant Contributions 4. Relevant Experience *Describe your previous experience relevant to the topic and objectives you are investigating in the application.*

References & Transcripts

CIHR	NSERC	SSHRC
2 sponsors	**2 reference letters**	**Appraisals** (4 total: 1 Proposed Supervisor "Research Appraisal" + 2 referee letters + 1 Institutional Nomination)
"Fulfillment of degree requirements" form to be signed by doctoral institution	Doctoral transcripts	no transcripts!

Other Materials

CIHR	NSERC	SSHRC
Sex & Gender Considerations (2,000 character text box) Certification Requirements CPRA - Status and Confirmation of Scientific Area Form SGBA+ Certificate Signature Page (supervisor) *Special Circumstances – 1pg *Priority Announcements	EDI Considerations in Research Process (text box) Justification for location of Tenure (text box if applicable) *Special Circumstances	Diversity Considerations in Research Design (1,700 character text box) *Teaching Appointment Letter Institutional nomination and commitment (dept head required) *Allowable inclusions ('special circumstances') *Supplements + Special Initiatives Optional (research-creation, indigenous research, etc. additional attachments)

Help with additional sections:
EDI & Indigenous Resources

Resources for the Sex & Gender/EDI Considerations in CPRA:

- EDI resources from Tri-Council and the University of Calgary
- Selection Criteria and Merit indicators related to EDI
- A screenshot of the EDI section within the application form

Indigenous Research Support Team

Understanding CPRA Selection Criteria

- **Research Potential and Experience (50%)**
- **Quality of Proposed Research Program (50%)**

Note: All three funders use the same main criteria, but each has unique subcriteria:

- SSHRC Subcriteria
- NSERC Subcriteria
- CIHR Subcriteria

Selection Criteria (SSHRC subcriteria)

Research Potential and Experience (50%)

- fellowships, scholarships or other awards obtained;
- previous research experience and/or publications; and
- timely completion of doctoral studies, taking into account the nature of the program and any related personal circumstances that may have delayed the applicant's academic career.

Quality of Proposed Research Program (50%)

- originality and potential significance of the proposed program of work;
- feasibility of the proposed program of work;
- appropriateness of the intended place of tenure; and
- effectiveness of the overall support provided by the host institution

Selection Criteria (SSHRC subcriteria)

Research Potential and Experience (50%)

- fellowships, scholarships or other awards obtained;
- previous research experience and/or publications; and
- timely completion of doctoral studies, taking into account the nature of the program and any related personal circumstances that may have delayed the applicant's academic career.

How do you improve this?

- You can't change what you've done… but you can change **how you present it**
- Remove unnecessary entries from your CV
- Clearly explain the connections between past experiences and future plans (in Applicant Statement, Relevant Experience, or Training Expectations)
- Use the Special Circumstances attachment to add context if appropriate
- References

Selection Criteria (from NSERC)

Research Potential and Experience (50%)

- NSERC: Quality of presentation of application
  - adherence to the NSERC online presentation and attachment standards
  - grantsmanship
  - proper spelling and grammar

How do you improve this?

- Follow Application Guidelines (including formatting!)

Selection Criteria

How do you improve this?

- Write a clear and easy to follow proposal
- Review your complete application for consistency
- Explain how this project is the logical next step in your professional development
- Explain why this is the perfect institution for the project

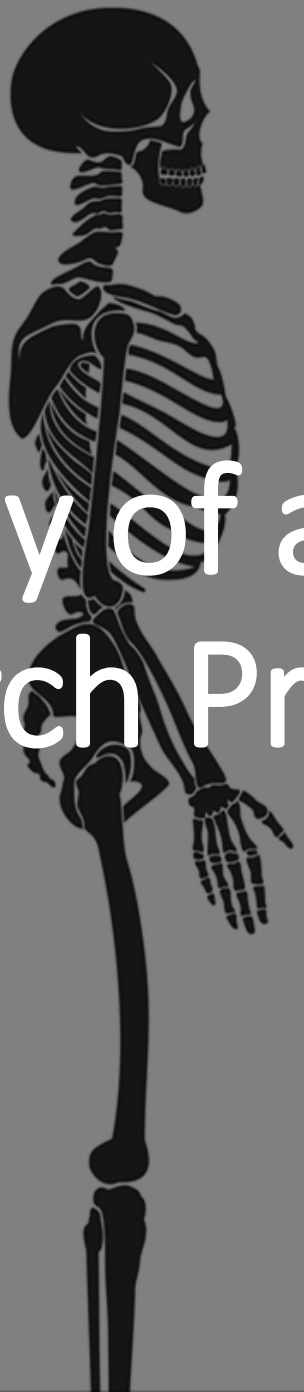
Quality of Proposed Research Program (50%)

- originality and potential significance of the proposed program of work;
- feasibility of the proposed program of work;
- appropriateness of the intended place of tenure; and
- effectiveness of the overall support provided by the host institution

Step 2: Proposal Writing as a Genre

What happens if you don't do exactly what you propose?

- Don't try to write a 2-year plan that lists everything you might do in 24 months…
- Write a strong proposal:
  - Focused
  - Well written & well communicated
  - Feasible in the time frame with the resources available
  - Significant contribution to research
  - Challenges you and develops your research career



Anatomy of a Strong Research Proposal

“An opportunity for you to present **your idea** and **proposed actions** for consideration in a shared decision-making situation. You, with all the integrity at your command, are helping those responsible for approving your proposal to see

how you view the situation,
how the idea fills a need,

how it builds on what has been done before,

how it will proceed,

how you will avoid pitfalls,

why pitfalls you have not avoided are not serious threats,

what the study’s consequences are likely to be and

what significance they are likely to have.

Your presentation displays your ability to assemble the foregoing materials into an internally considered chain of reasoning. “

(Krathwohl, 1998, p. 65)

Proposal Writing as a Journey

- *You'll be writing proposals for a long time — It's a regular part of academic life and research careers.*

- Each proposal is a step forward — not just toward funding but toward becoming the researcher you aim to be.

Reality Check: Readiness, Rejection, Resilience

- **Be Realistic About Readiness**

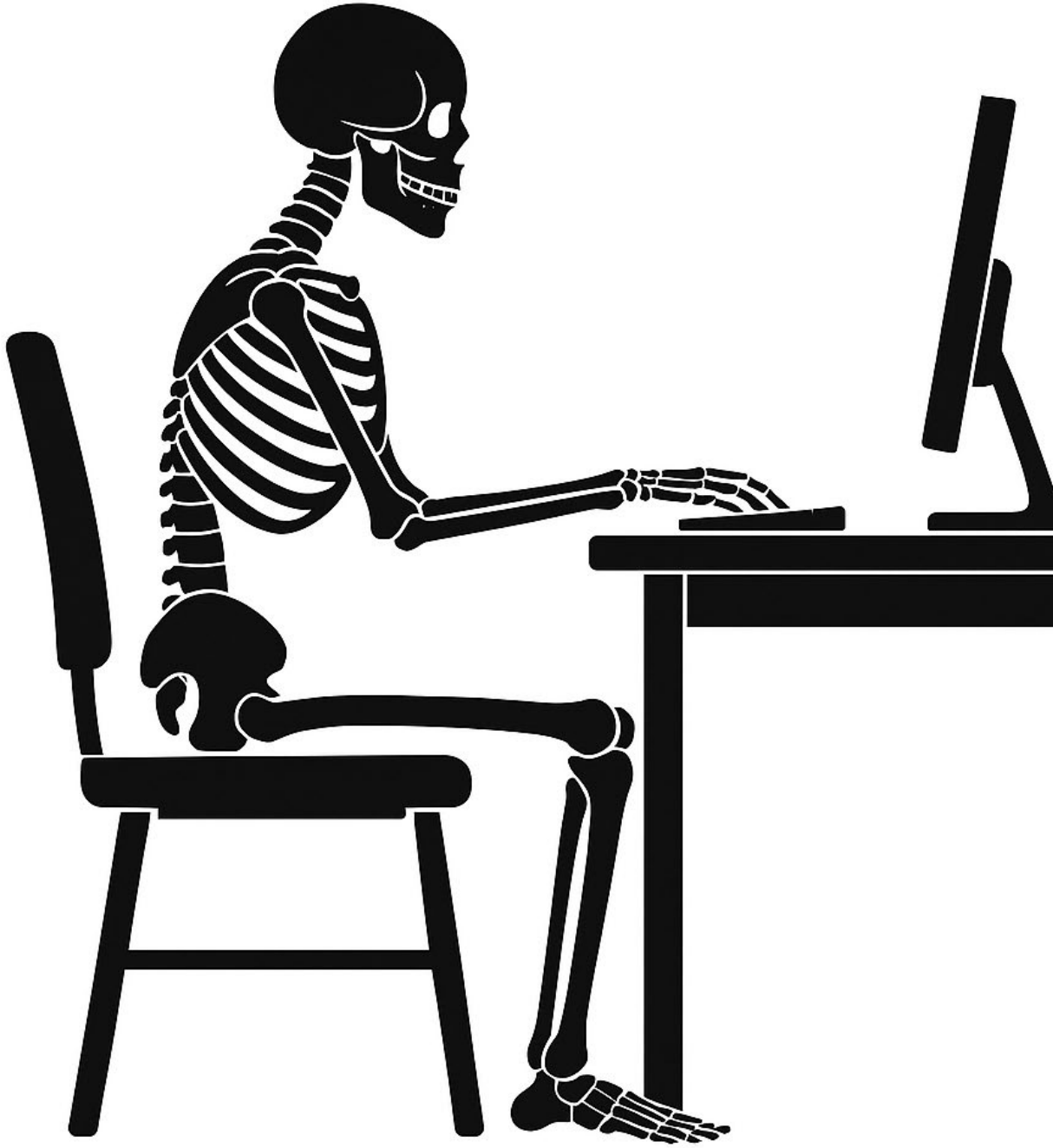
Building a strong foundation increases chances of success and strengthens future applications: *if more time is needed to publish papers and build a research profile, that's okay!*

- **Preparing for Rejection**

"It is a highly competitive fellowship, is it worth going through the application process?"
Yes! Rejection is common and part of academia.

- **Approach the process with a long-term mindset**

It's Okay to Wait. It's Okay to Fail. Just Don't Quit.



Choosing the *Right* Research Topic

Do you have the skills/knowledge/expertise?
Choose a topic that builds on your existing expertise while also helping you acquire new skills.

Does it matter?
Make sure your topic addresses a real gap in the field and has potential for meaningful contribution.

Can you get it done in time?
Be realistic about what's achievable within the fellowship timeframe. Reviewers will be.

What makes it new and *yours*?

- **If entering a new research area:** What skills do you currently need to strengthen to successfully lead and complete this research? How essential are they to the project's success?
- **If staying in the same lab/supervisor:** Are you able to demonstrate the independence of your project, highlight its novelty through a new direction or unique collaborations? Show why this supervisor and/or institution is key to your project and research success?

Where is it taking you?
Your research project should set the stage for your future research and career goals.

Bones of a Research Proposal: Basic Structure

- Context/ Rationale/ Background
- Research Problem / “Gap”
- Research Question
- Methodology
    - Description
    - Aims/ Activities
    - Methods
    - Analysis
- Significance and Impact

Establishing the Context

- This should be **a focused synthesis** presenting the specific body of knowledge your work will contribute to, rather than a comprehensive literature review.
- Demonstrate **awareness of alternative viewpoints** and argue your position in such a way as to address the field broadly, rather than developing a factional position that is indifferent to alternate voices/ perspectives.
- **This is a form of storytelling, too!** Show how your work grew out of the intellectual history/ life of the field, the country or region that generated it and/or your professional and personal experiences that sparked your intellectual curiosity.

Research Gap

"A research problem is the issue or concern that leads to the need for a study. A research gap occurs when a researcher finds a part of the topic that has not been explored or studied before."

— John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*

Research Gap: Example

Despite national efforts to distribute insecticide-treated nets in Kenya, malaria parasitaemia remains high among children under 5 in the Lake Victoria basin. The effectiveness of Insecticide-Treated Net (ITNs) compared to untreated nets in this specific setting is not well understood, limiting evidence-based public health strategies.

Exercise: Mind the Gap

Take a moment to think about the research gap you can address.

What are the boundaries of what is known? (*we know X but not in the context of Y*)

Why is the gap a problem?

Articulating Your Research Question

- Start with the research gap
- Define the problem clearly
- Ensure it's specific, researchable (*Can you collect and analyze data to answer it?)* and aligned with your disciplinary field
- Consider why it matters (*How will answering this question contribute to the field/society?)*
- Ideally one research question.
  Break down if necessary/relevant/feasible (e.g. 2 sub-questions)

Frameworks for a Good Research Question

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

PICO

PICO Element	Description
P (Population, Patient, Problem)	The group or population you are studying
I (Intervention, Prognostic Factor, or Exposure)	The main intervention, exposure, or factor of interest
C (Comparison)	The control or comparison group (if applicable)
O (Outcome)	The outcome or effect you want to measure

PICO Example

PICO Example

- **Problem**: malaria infection
- **Population**: children under 5 years of age
- **Intervention**: The application of an insecticide-treated net
- **Comparison**: Children living in families who has been provided untreated nets
- **Outcome**: The rate of parasitaemia after the intervention

Result:

Among children under 5 years of age living around the Lake Victoria basin in Kenya, are insecticide-treated mosquito nets more effective than untreated nets at preventing parasitaemia?

PICO Example

Result:

Among children under 5 years of age living around the Lake Victoria basin in Kenya, are insecticide-treated mosquito nets more effective than untreated nets at preventing parasitaemia?

Two possible sub-questions:

- What is the difference in malaria incidence between children under five using ITNs versus those using untreated nets?
- Are there contextual factors (e.g. net usage patterns, household characteristics) that influence the effectiveness of ITNs?

PEO Example

PICO was developed for clinical research. PEO is a useful alternative for qualitative projects.

PEO Example

- **Population**: Immigrants, diagnosed dementia
- **Exposure**: Culturally-tailored exercise program
- **Outcome**: Embodied creativity and identity

Result:
How do culturally-tailored exercise programs for immigrants living with dementia impact their identities?

PEO Example

These Research Question frameworks are more easily applied to clinical and qualitative projects, but with some creativity can be applied to other approaches. Sometimes the "Population" is not a living thing:

PEO Example

- **Population**: Graphic novels set in the Arctic
- **Exposure**: Climate Research
- **Outcome**: Social change

Result:
In graphic novels set in the Arctic, do narratives that feature climate research generate social change?

Exercise 2: Drafting a Research Question

Using the framework of your choice, what's your research question?

Specific Aims

- Build **SMART** aims that are ***Specific***, ***Measurable***, ***Achievable***, ***Relevant*** to your research question, and ***Time-bound*** within your project timeline.
- Each aim should explain **why** it matters, **how** you'll approach it, and **what** outcome you expect.
- Ideally **2-4** specific aims. Having too many (4+) aims, can scatter your focus and weaken your methodology.
- If you do propose multiple aims, make sure that failure in one aim does not prevent you from other aims.
- Use **action-oriented verbs** such as: *Conduct, Analyze, Investigate, Compare, Examine, Demonstrate, Produce, Determine...*
- Organize your aims in a **logical sequence** that reflects your overall approach and the flow of the project.

Specific Aims: Example

Research Question: How do contemporary Canadian female authors portray the complexities of motherhood in fiction written between 1990 and 2020?

Aim 1: To analyze recurring themes and narrative strategies related to motherhood in ten selected novels by Canadian female authors.

Aim 2: To assess how these representations reflect or challenge prevailing cultural norms around gender roles and caregiving during this period.

Methodology: General Elements

- **Types of methods that will be used:** Qualitative, quantitative, experiments, or mixed-methods; why these are most suitable, and what knowledge will be gained by answering the research question through these methods.
- **Specific cases that will be studied**: Groups, institutions, and geographical locations that will be involved; how the cases will be assessed; and how the data will be collected and analysed.
- **Specifics about the data:** What it will measure; how much will be collected, and when (e.g. X survey respondents, X interviews with Y groups, X experiments). If relevant, include sample size, or descriptions of research sites, participants, or recruitment criteria.
- **Specifics about Analysis Plan:** How will you analyze the data to answer your research questions? How will the data be used to answer the research question.
- **Ethics / Limitations / Positionality (if relevant)**
  What are the key ethical considerations (e.g., informed consent, confidentiality, data security) and potential limitations (e.g., sample size, generalizability)? If applicable, reflect on your positionality as a researcher and how you will address potential biases.

Methodology: Example

I will answer these questions in a three-phase research program.

- **Study 1 (months x-x):**
- Description
- Specific Aim
- Methods
- Analysis

- **Study 2 (months x-x)**
- Description
- Specific Aim
- Methods
- Analysis

- **Study 3 (months x-x)**
- Description
- Specific Aim
- Methods
- Analysis

Demonstrating Project Feasibility to Reviewers

- Many proposals fail because reviewers are left wondering what the applicant will actually do and how they will achieve their objectives. Be clear and detailed!
- A strong methodology section convinces reviewers you have a clear, **feasible**, and rigorous plan to answer your research question.
- Don't just describe **what** you want to achieve – explain **how** you will spend your time doing it.
- Not just a list of tasks, but a clear argument for why this is the best approach to the question, and how you have the skills to do it.
- **Golden Thread**: Aligning questions, aims, research design, and analysis to address a single, well-defined problem.
- Use the timeline (Gant or diagram) to shows *when* you will carry out each part of your methodology and other project activities and depends on the complexity and scope of your project.

Bibliography*

- Reviewers often treat bibliographies as a sign of knowledge/mastery on the part of the applicant.
- A good bibliography testifies that you did enough foundational work to make sure the project complements, rather than duplicate other's efforts.
- Many proposals fail because the references are incomplete or **outdated**!
- How you use the Bibliography/Citations depends on your agency

Significance/ Impact

- **Professional:** Strengthens the researcher's expertise, positions them as an emerging leader in the field, and supports long-term academic or career goals.
- **Methodological**: Develops or adapts innovative methods; improves how research is conducted in the field.
- **Theoretical**: How your project advances or challenges existing theories; contributes new concepts to scholarly discourse.
- **Applied**: Offers practical solutions or tools for specific stakeholders or sectors.
- **Social**: Addresses societal challenges; contributes to public understanding or social change.

Exercise 3: Impact and Significance

Think about where you would be in September 2028 (when your award is almost over). What is different for:

1. You and your career?
2. Your specific discipline?
3. Your field broadly?
4. Research/academia broadly?
5. Canadians? The world?

Step 3: Knowing and Writing For Your Audience

Review Committees

CIHR (2)	NSERC (13)	SSHRC (6)
1. Biomedical and/or Clinical Research 2. Health services research and/or social, cultural, environmental and population health research	1. Cellular and Molecular Biology 2. Chemical, Biomedical and Materials Science Engineering 3. Chemistry 4. Civil and Industrial Engineering 5. Computing Sciences 6. Electrical Engineering 7. Evolution and Ecology 8. Geosciences 9. Mathematical Sciences 10. Mechanical Engineering 11. Physics and Astronomy 12. Plant and Animal Biology 13. Psychology	1. Fine Arts & Literature (all types) 2. Classical archaeology, classics, classical and dead languages, history, mediaeval studies, philosophy, religious studies 3. Anthropology, archaeology (except classical archaeology), criminology, folklore, sociology 4. Education, linguistics, psychology, social work 5. Economics, industrial relations, law, management, business, administrative studies, political science 6. Archival science, communications and media studies, demography, environmental studies, geography, library and information science, urban and regional studies

Write for multidisciplinary readers – for example

- SSHRC Committee 1: Literature and Fine Arts – 8 members
  - French Literature
  - English Literature
  - Music (Piano)
  - Music Studies (Indigenous)
  - Human Centred Design
  - Museum and Curatorial Studies
  - Cinema and Media Studies (Historical)
  - Cinema and Media Studies (Experimental)

Your reviewer is tired

NSERC review committee guide

2.4 Roles and responsibilities

2.4.1 Members

Members participate in the review of applications and provide recommendations based on the program selection criteria.

Specific responsibilities include

- completing the Bias in Peer Review training module and taking steps to help mitigate unconscious biases during the review process
- reading the Instructions for completing an application
- reading the Tri-agency Statement on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)
- reading Equity, diversity and inclusion considerations at each stage of the research process
- reading the Guidelines on the assessment of contributions to research, training and mentoring
- completing the self-identification questionnaire
- participating in orientation meetings and discussions
- submitting comfort ratings and identifying conflicts of interest for all applications received
- reading, scoring and providing in-depth evaluations for a subset of applications within the assigned timeframe
- reading, participating in deliberations for and scoring all applications discussed during the review meeting for postdoctoral applications
- notifying NSERC staff of research proposals that may be outside of NSERC's mandate
- providing feedback to NSERC staff and the review committee chair on policy and procedural items in preparation for the chairs' meeting
- recommending potential new members

2.6 Time commitment

- Participation of experts in the review of applications is crucial to the success of the doctoral and postdoctoral programs; serving in this capacity involves a significant time commitment. Contributing as a member demands periods of activity that may interfere with normal responsibilities. It is recommended that an appropriate amount of time is set aside for the thorough review of applications.

How set in stone are the project's and movement's names at this point? To grow faster, the movement needs to make a good first impression, taking advantage of anyone's fleeting first exposure to it so a person will want to learn more and believe it could actually offer a possible real solution or they won't bother. But this name, "The Venus Project", rather than encouraging one to listen with an open mind could cause one's antennae to go up, waiting for the crazy, not realistic, 'out of this world' part. I'm guessing the Venus in the Venus Project comes from Jacque being in Venus, Florida, but to any newbie "Venus" means something "out there" on other planet, and I think that makes an easily avoidable bad first impression. The "Venus Project" name doesn't sound serious to me, it sounds childish. Also the name of the movement, "Zeitgeist", is not only needlessly non-self-descriptive (we're wasting valuable exposure time with a mysterious name - losing the opportunity that on each occasion when the name of the organization is mentioned, that in itself could be sending an introduction to a new idea, like if the name were 'Technology Solves All' Movement for a sloppy example), but it will also forever tie the movement to what some will call the conspiracy stuff (9/11, religion, etc.) because of your identically named movie Zeitgeist, and this will only distract and alienate from the RBE prize. I was in the 911 Truth Movement and saw up front & personal so many who had an instinctively negative visceral reaction to any suggestion that 9/11 was an inside job, that they would hear no more. Also, why alienate those with strong beliefs in their religion? Is it really necessary for us to first convince everyone they've been lied to about everything their whole life before introducing a sane alternative to a profit based society when there are no good jobs anymore even in the first world? People are desperate for an alternative and these other things I think are unhelpful distractions to a beginner's introduction to the possibility of another way. Activists for a new system won't get so many bites at the mainstream media exposure apple that we can afford to squander any by tying a hand behind our back with unimportant inconsequential stuff like names and logos. Perhaps if we eliminate these easily changed hurdles, the movement will grow faster and have less flack and debunking charges to respond to. Trust me, I know that responding to 911 debunking charges is a full time job in itself, it's a rabbit hole. Unless we get away from the Zeitgeist movie name, we will be linked to the what people call the 'conspiracy' stuff. Of course, this suggestion should not in anyway detract from your contribution, Peter. You actually created the movement, right? and probably lots of us learned of it BECAUSE of your movie's addressing of the 'conspiracy' stuff. This is truly only a request for a superficial and easily made change to de-link the V.P. and a R.B.E. with the unrelated items others deem conspiracy and/or non-positive theories. I say easily made because people's flyers, dvd sleeves, logos, stuff that is printed when needed, can be changed digitally on computers through existing technology generally available to those who print the stuff (just retyping, or simple editing, right?) and there aren't stockpiles of stuff with the current names on it that would be wasted I assume? Thanks in advance for your consideration, and please also address whom you think such a decision as to the movement's name should be made.

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Research Proposal Justin MacCallum

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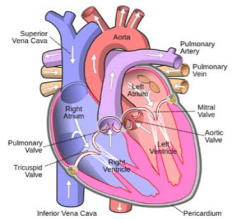

Figure 1: Figures can be helpful.

Approach. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit. Maecenas porttitor congue massa. Fusce posuere, magna sed pulvinar ultricies, purus lectus malesuada libero, sit amet commodo magna eros quis urna. Nunc viverra imperdiet enim. Fusce est. Vivamus a tellus. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas. Proin pharetra nonummy pede. Mauris et orci. Aenean nec lorem. In porttitor. Donec laoreet nonummy augue. Suspendisse dui purus, scelerisque at, vulputate vitae, pretium mattis, nunc. Mauris eget neque at sem venenatis eleifend. Ut nonummy.

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Formatting Tips

- Headers! (follow the guidelines…)
- White space / Logical paragraphs
- A picture/figure can be worth 1000 words (for better or worse)
- Attachment style requirements

From NSERC:
Provide a detailed yet concise description of your proposed research project for the period during which you are to hold the award. Be as specific as possible. Provide **background** information to position your proposed research within the **context** of the current knowledge in the field. State the **significance** of the proposed research to a field or fields in the NSE. State the **objectives and hypothesis** and outline the experimental or theoretical **approach** to be taken (citing literature pertinent to the proposal) and the **methods** and procedures to be used.

Make it easy for your audience

- Avoid jargon and acronyms
- Define your key concepts
- If you can't define it, find a simpler phrase

"fold in the cheese"

X "you just… fold it in"

✓ "gently mix"

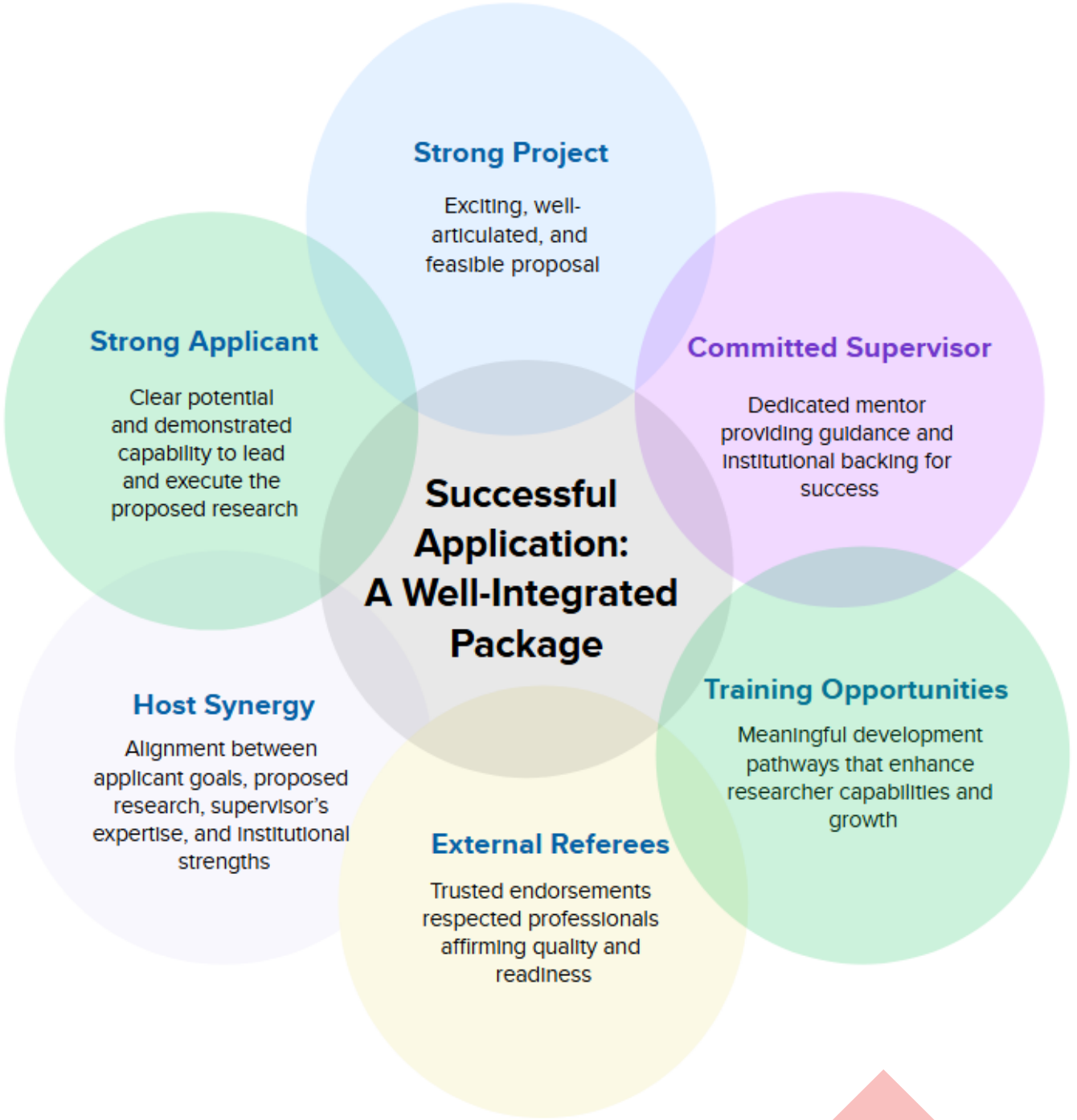
“The reader is not a mind reader.”

— *William Zinsser, On Writing Well*

Make Use of the Space Available

- Your application is more than the attachments you upload.
- Look at the application portal early. Understand how the complete application looks and the order that the information is presented.
  - Have someone else read the complete application from start to finish.
- Avoid direct copy/paste between sections.

Strategies for a Successful Application


Strong Project
Exciting, well-articulated, and feasible proposal
Strong Applicant
Clear potential and demonstrated capability to lead and execute the proposed research
Committed Supervisor
Dedicated mentor providing guidance and institutional backing for success
Successful Application: A Well-Integrated Package
Host Synergy
Alignment between applicant goals, proposed research, supervisor's expertise, and institutional strengths
Training Opportunities
Meaningful development pathways that enhance researcher capabilities and growth
External Referees
Trusted endorsements respected professionals affirming quality and readiness

Strategies for Preparing Your Application

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Display the Right Fit Across All Dimensions:
Applicant (your skills & potential) | **Project** (clear, exciting, feasible) | **Institution** (supportive environment) | **Supervisor** (relevant expertise & committed mentorship)

Use Effective Communication:
Reach out **well in advance** and be proactive — don't rely solely on email. Arrange informal meetings (coffee chats, office visits) to share your progress and enthusiasm. Keep supervisors and referees engaged with regular updates, including an updated CV and key achievements.

Implement Tailored Reference Strategy:
Avoid sending the same info to all referees. Strategically assign different skills and accomplishments for each to highlight, aligned with evaluation criteria — creating a comprehensive and strong overall endorsement.

Example: NSERC Selection criteria and indicators

Research Potential and Experience (50%)	Evidence	Quality of Proposed Research Program (50%)	Evidence
a) Contributions to research and development	*Contributions & Statements (Parts I–III); Thesis; Ref letters; Tech transfer letter (if any)*	a) Significance, clarity, and feasibility	*Outline of proposed research Justification for location of tenure*
b) Professional, academic and extracurricular interactions and collaborations	*Contributions & Statement (Part III); Work/Research experience; Ref letters*	b) Justification for location of tenure	*Justification for location of tenure*
c) Relevant training (academic, lived experience, traditional teachings)	*Contributions & Statement (Part III); Work/Research experience; Ref letters*	c) Academic training and relevant work experience	*Academic/Research/Work experience; Contributions (Part III); Ref letters*
d) Scholarships and awards	*Scholarships and Awards list; Contributions (Parts I–III); Ref letters*		
e) Recognition for research outputs (papers, posters, volunteer outreach, etc.)	*Awards list; Contributions (Parts I–III); Ref letters*		
f) Researcher attributes (curiosity, independence, integrity, etc.)	*Contributions (Parts II–III); Ref letters; Research proposal*		
g) Ability to complete projects (timeliness, motivation)	*Academic background; Thesis; Contributions (Parts II–III); Ref letters*		
h) Publication participation	*Contributions (Parts I–II); Ref letters*		
i) Quality of application presentation	*All sections of the application (excluding reference letters)*		

Managing Your Timeline

1. Start early – quality writing takes time.
2. Avoid last-minute rushes; successful applications rarely come from them.
3. Be patient – Expect 4-5 revisions to your draft
4. Allow time for external reviewers to read your application well before the deadline.
5. Know your internal and funder deadlines

Know Your Deadlines

Agency	UCalgary Detailed Review	Sponsor/Reference Deadline	UCalgary Institutional Approvals	Agency Submission
SSHRC	August 25, 2025	Same as agency submission	**September 5, 2025**	September 11, 2025
CIHR	August 28, 2025	September 9, 2025	**September 11, 2025**	September 17, 2025
NSERC	September 29, 2025	Same as agency submission	**October 10, 2025**	October 17, 2025

Internal Review and Approvals Process

Submit the following two items to fellowships@ucalgary.ca by the internal deadline:

- PDF Preview of the complete application
- Completed RFAA Form, signed by:
  - Applicant (Postdoc)
  - Supervisor
  - Department Head (if applicable)
  - Dean/Associate Dean (Research)

**CSM applicants: Send the form to medgrant@ucalgary.ca for CSM ADR approval.*

*Begin collecting signature pages as early as possible to avoid last-minute stress

UCalgary Support: Featured Events

- **Strategies for Articulating the Impact of Your Past and Future Research**
  August 12, 2025 | 1:00–2:00 PM (MT) | Online
  In collaboration with the Knowledge to Impact team, this session will help you: Highlight significant research contributions; Demonstrate the impact of your work; Build effective knowledge mobilization strategies
  👉**Register**

- CSM Grant Development Office:
  How to Apply to the CIHR - Canadian Postdoctoral Research Awards (CPRA) 2025
  August 14, 2025 | 1:00–2:00 PM (MT) | Online
  👉 **Register**

- **Creating a Persuasive CV**
  August 14, 2025 | 3:00–4:30 PM (MT) | Online
  Co-hosted with the Grant Development Office (GDO), this session will guide you through best practices for formatting, structure, and content strategy to help ensure your CV stands out.
  👉 **Register**

FAQs

FAQ: Eligibility Updates for 2025

- Hold (or expect to hold) a doctorate or **health professional degree** before the **award start date**.
- Not hold or be on leave from a tenure-track or tenured faculty position.
- Have completed all degree requirements **no more than three years before September 1, 2025**.
  - **Extensions** up to 36 additional months may be granted for career interruptions due to caregiving, illness, conflict, socioeconomic barriers, clinical training, or relevant non-academic work.)
  - Eligibility of applicants who completed their PhD at UCalgary are eligible to apply under the same PI

International Applicants

- Must be enrolled in or have completed a doctorate/health professional degree at a **Canadian institution**, or
- Be currently conducting postdoctoral research at a Canadian institution.

Up to **20% of awards** are available to international applicants.

FAQ: Selecting the Appropriate Agency

Select the agency whose research mandate most closely aligns to the research subject matter in your application to ensure it will be reviewed by experts in disciplines closest to your field(s) of study. Applications submitted to the incorrect agency may be removed from the competition. For more information, see **Selecting the Appropriate Federal Granting Agency**.

- **Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR):** Health sciences, including biomedical, clinical, health systems, and population health research. If you are applying to CIHR, consider the information on **CIHR's website**.

- **Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC):** Natural sciences, engineering, computer science, mathematics, and related fields. If you are applying to NSERC, see the **Addendum to the guidelines for the eligibility of applications related to health**, which has additional information and specific examples relating to subject matter.

- **Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC):** Social sciences, humanities, arts, law, education, and related disciplines. If you are applying to SSHRC, see the information on SSHRC's **Subject Matter Eligibility** webpage.

Selecting the Appropriate Agency

CIHR: support-soutien@cihr-irsc.gc.ca

SSHRC: fellowships@sshrc-crsh.gc.ca

NSERC: nsercscholarships-boursescrsng@nserc-crsng.gc.ca

FAQ: Responsible Use of AI in Grant Writing

- The *Guidance on the use of generative AI in the preparation of grant applications* acknowledges AI as a helpful tool to improve efficiency, assist non-native English/French speakers, and streamline proposal writing.
- **Applicants are fully responsible** for ensuring their applications are accurate, complete, and original.
- **All sources must be properly acknowledged** — AI use must not result in plagiarism or lack of authorship recognition.
- Use AI responsibly and verify all outputs before submission.

UCalgary Support: Your One-Stop CPRA Resource Hub

To make your application process easier, we have created a **dedicated CPRA webpage** with everything you need in one place: Canada Postdoctoral Research Award (CPRA) | Research at UCalgary | University of Calgary

- Instructions for the SSHRC, NSERC, and CIHR competitions
- Direct links to agency program pages and application portals
- Detailed information about internal approval deadlines and submission procedures at UCalgary
- Helpful resources for both applicants and supervisors

Thank you and Good luck!

Resources

- **Valeriya Klymenko, Postdoctoral Fellowships Specialist**
  fellowships@ucalgary.ca
- **Katie Ryan, Awards Specialist, Faculty of Science**
  katie.ryan@ucalgary.ca *(Faculty of Science applicants only)*
- **Indigenous Research Support Team**
  irst@ucalgary.ca
- **Research Services EDI Team**
  edi.rso@ucalgary.ca

(if we don’t use full 2 hours) Free Writing Time

Instruction
instructions