



Program Details

Rapid Response 2026: Biomarkers

Important Dates*

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|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Information Webinar(s) | February 3, 2026 February 17, 2026 |
| Letter of Intent (LOI) Deadline | March 17, 2026 |
| Full Proposal Deadline | August 4, 2026 |
| Anticipated Award Notice | November 2026 |

*Dates subject to change

About the Foundation

At the Weston Family Foundation, more than 60 years of philanthropy have taught us that there is a relationship between healthy landscapes and healthy people. That is why we champion world-class health research and innovation with the same passion that we support initiatives to protect and restore biodiversity on Canada's unique landscapes. We take a collaborative approach to philanthropy, working alongside forward-thinking partners to advance Canada and create lasting impacts. We aspire to do more than provide funding; we want to enable others to find transformational ways to improve the well-being of Canadians.

Weston Brain Institute

The Foundation, through the Weston Brain Institute, aims to catalyze and scale science-based approaches to significantly improve the health and well-being of Canadians. The Foundation will take a leadership role in tackling large problems that are under-addressed by supporting research that is particularly relevant to Canadian's health and that empowers Canadians to improve their health and wellbeing.

Program Overview

1. Project Scope

The Rapid Response 2026: Biomarkers program supports translational/applied research to accelerate the validation to clinical implementation of:

- Biological (e.g., blood, plasma, cerebrospinal fluid),
- Functional (e.g., EEG signatures, sleep architecture abnormalities, olfactory tests, retinal changes), and



- Digital cognitive/behavioural (e.g., passive app-based cognition, gait patterns, speech analysis)

biomarkers for neurodegenerative diseases of aging (NDAs), with a preference for, but not limited to, enabling early detection and timely and accurate diagnosis of dementia.

Basic/discovery research, including but not limited to understanding disease mechanisms, discovering genes implicated in disease, and identifying new biomarkers, is not in scope and will not be funded.

Biomarkers must address unmet needs in the staging, prognosis, diagnosis, monitoring of disease progression, and differentiation of NDAs. Biomarker modalities must address barriers to accessibility and adoption by prioritizing approaches that are scalable, minimally invasive, and feasible for implementation across diverse settings. Examples include blood/plasma, cerebrospinal fluid (CSF), or digital markers (e.g., sensory-derived, wearable technology, digital cognitive makers). Brain imaging biomarkers (e.g., MRI, PET) are not in scope but can be included as gold standards to validate another type of biomarker.

Projects should enable the development of the biomarker from the validation stage onward; those covering only the discovery and early development of biomarkers will not be considered.

Preliminary data are required for this program, which should serve to support the rationale, hypothesis, and feasibility of the study. Strong feasibility data from published literature may be used to support the rationale for the study; however, preliminary data generated in the applicant's own laboratory are required to demonstrate prior experience and expertise in the research area.

2. Funding Specifications

The Foundation is able to fund 4-6 grants through this program. Grants are contingent on the receipt of high-quality applications. The Foundation reserves the right to adjust the funding envelope at its sole discretion. For every program, the Foundation considers the scalability and real-world impact of the projects it selects and funds. To this end, the Foundation will often continue to fund and scale projects that demonstrate success with ongoing and enhanced support. Such decisions are at the sole-discretion of the Foundation based on the performance of projects within its portfolio and their alignment with strategic goals.

- Projects can request up to \$300,000.
- All grants provided by the Foundation are provided in tranches and contingent upon grantees meeting pre-defined project milestones and reporting requirements, including but not limited to the submission of progress/milestone and/or annual reports.

- Project activities must be completed and funds used over a period of up to 18-24 months.
- For this program, funds cannot be used for overhead or operating expenses and cannot be used for capacity building or saved as a contingency.
- The funds awarded may deviate from the full amount requested.
- Each item and its cost must be clearly described in the budget (provided at the proposal stage).
- Budgets should be developed to account for rising costs during the tenure of the project. This could be calculated at 2% per year.
- A proportion of the funds can be used for goods and services procured outside of Canada (e.g., licensing IP, costs associated with accessing a database). However, it is required that the majority of funds will be spent on work (i.e., goods and services) conducted in Canada.

Responsibility for the planning, direction, and execution of the proposed project will rest solely with the applicants.

LOIs are welcome from both Canadian **qualified donees** and Canadian **non-qualified donees** as defined by the CRA with projects that are keeping with the program guidelines and describing proposed work that is charitable. Only those who successfully pass both the LOI review and an internal diligence review by the Foundation will be invited to submit a full proposal.

Multiple institutions: In the event of collaboration between multiple institutions, it is the responsibility of the Principal Applicant to subcontract and distribute/manage funds appropriately and in a timely manner.

Full or partial support of projects: The Foundation can support a full project or a portion of any project. In the case of the latter, applicants should provide proof of the necessary resources to complete the full project.

Conditional funding and milestones: Grants are conditional on grantees meeting pre-determined milestones and providing deliverables, including submission of progress reports and/or participation in Foundation sponsored assessment meetings. Continued support is contingent upon the progress reports being favourably reviewed by the Foundation.

Supplemental funding: The Foundation encourages grantees to seek additional funds outside the Weston Family Foundation to further their work once the term of the initial grant has ended. The Foundation does not guarantee renewal or continuation of grants. The Foundation may, at its discretion, seek to further support successful projects, prioritizing funding and championing projects that advance, shape, and transform outcomes that unlock real-world impact at scale. Grantees are also eligible to apply for funding through other Foundation programs.

3. Intended Outcomes and Impacts



The Foundation assesses the impact of awarded grants through the results and outcomes achieved for each project. It is important that projects aim to achieve outcomes that can address the goals of the Rapid Response 2026: Biomarkers program and the overall mission of the Foundation.

The following are examples of outcomes expected.

| Outcome | Measure (e.g.,) |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Commercial Developments | IP filings/disclosure, license agreements |
| Leveraged Funding | Additional funding support during or after the Rapid Response grant to expand on or continue the project |
| Media attention/coverage | Mentions/coverage via traditional news outlets, social media, policy, etc. |
| Partnerships/Collaborations | New partnerships/collaborations (clinical, community, industrial) |
| Resources | New research tools, new methodology, datasets |
| Clinical Implementation | E.g., evidence of improving early detection and diagnosis of dementia |
| Clinical Trial Integration | Inclusion of the biomarker in a proposed or ongoing clinical trial testing an NDA intervention. |

4. Program Eligibility

LOIs are welcome from both Canadian **qualified donees** and Canadian **non-qualified donees** as defined by the CRA with projects that are keeping with the program guidelines and describing proposed work that is charitable. Only those who successfully pass both the LOI review and an internal diligence review by the Foundation will be invited to submit a full proposal.

Applicants can submit a maximum of one application, when acting as a Principal Applicant, to the program. Applicants may appear as a Co-Applicant or Collaborator on any number of applications. Current or past Foundation grantees can also submit applications.

5. Application Process

The application process consists of two stages: LOIs and Proposals. Applicants must submit a LOI to the Foundation to be considered for Proposal submission to the Program. Each LOI will be reviewed internally by the Foundation with consultation from expert advisors as required.

The LOI stage of the application process is a brief but significant stage of evaluation.



Applicants whose LOIs meet the review criteria and are favourably reviewed will be invited to submit a full Proposal. Applicants will be required to obtain and submit relevant institutional signatures at the Proposal stage. Complete Proposals will be reviewed by a review panel comprising of international subject experts.

If awarded, applicants must ensure that the grant agreement is reviewed and signed within four weeks of notification of selection; otherwise, the Foundation reserves the right to cancel the grant. We will not entertain modifications to the terms listed within our agreements unless an organization can provide proof of statutory restrictions or limitations that prevent them from fulfilling the terms of the agreement.

Our application process is interactive. Applicants are encouraged to connect with the Foundation to discuss their prospective applications for eligibility and fit. During the review process you may receive additional questions from the review committee that need to be addressed prior to final decisions being made.

The Foundation will be offering two online information webinars during which prospective applicants can learn more about the program. Both webinars will feature the same content, resources and information and are designed to provide multiple opportunities for prospective applicants to engage with the program team prior to the LOI deadline. A recording of the webinar will be available online.

6. Review Criteria

At the LOI stage, the primary focus will be on eligibility, the innovation and design of the proposed project, and a clear link between the project and the goals of the program.

Eligibility:

- Is the principal applicant eligible to receive funding as per all eligibility requirements?

Scope:

- Is the project consistent with the program strategy/funding priorities?

Innovation:

- Is the biomarker superior to other approaches that are in development? Does it add to or modify current approaches? (e.g., does it address problems associated with the existing approaches?).
- Does the project challenge and/or advance current paradigms and theories?
- Will the work refine, improve, or be a new application of theoretical concepts, approaches, methodologies, instrumentation, or intervention?
- If successful, is the project likely to attract venture, pharma or government/policy interest to further develop the biomarker towards clinical implementation?

Impact:

- If successful, will the project realistically advance the development of biomarkers for



NDAs from validation onwards towards clinical impact across diverse populations in Canada?

- Does the project address an important problem, unmet need or critical barrier to progress in the field?

Experimental approach:

- Is the overall strategy, methodology and analyses well-reasoned and feasible, supported by strong preliminary data, and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project?
- Are common challenges and pitfalls within the experimental approach identified and potentially addressed?
- Are both sexes included in participant recruitment, samples or animal models, if applicable?

Additional criteria considered when reviewing Proposals:

Knowledge mobilization (KM):

- Is the proposed KM plan well-thought out and actionable to achieve meaningful impact?
- Does the current project align with the proposed KM plan?
- Are the co-production partners, milestones and timelines listed in the KM plan realistic for the achievement of the plan? For example,
 - Are there clear and appropriate next steps after this study to continue development if successful?
 - Has the applicant considered the scientific and regulatory requirements that are necessary to move the project to the next stage of development, out-licensing and/or company formation?
 - Has the applicant and/or institution developed intellectual property protection (if applicable)? If not, is there a clear strategy and timeline to do so?

Team and environment:

- Are the investigator and investigative team appropriately trained and well-suited to carry out this work?
- Does the team have experience with projects of similar scope and complexity?
- If needed, does the investigative team have the infrastructure support and/or a track record of success to further develop the biomarker (e.g., out-license, company formation, policy/regulatory)?
- Does the scientific environment in which the work will be conducted contribute to the probability of success? Does the proposed work take advantage of the unique features of the scientific environment or employ useful collaborative arrangements?

Milestones and Timeline:

- Are the milestones and timeline feasible yet aggressive for the proposed project?



- Are there clear and appropriate go/no-go criteria, quantifiable outcome measures, and clear endpoints for each tranche of funding?

Budget:

- Is the budget appropriate for the research proposed?

Scalability:

- Is there a realistic likelihood of scaling this project to serve a greater population/geography/species/disease/treatment?

7. Reports and Assessments

Grantees are responsible for the completion of the following if a grant is awarded:

Milestones:

Proposed projects must include clear, quantified milestones that guide the continuation of a project. Pre-determined milestones, as agreed upon by the Grantees and the Foundation before contracting, will be used to determine reporting dates and the distribution of payment tranches. A milestone report will be required one month in advance of payment.

For a given tranche of work, there may be one or more Go/No-Go criteria in which, only if achieved, the work is ready to continue. Otherwise, the project should not move forward, and the grantee should contact the Foundation to discuss the next steps. Go/No-Go's may not be required in every tranche. Grantee and Foundation Staff should mutually confirm Go/No-Go's.

If applicable, grantees will submit participant recruitment reports at least every 3 months to ensure that recruitment is on track.

Progress and Budget Reports:

Interim reports on milestone achievement and financial reconciliation are due according to the milestone timelines. An annual progress report including a brief written report with detailed budget reconciliation is due at a minimum every 12 months unless otherwise notified by the Foundation. Submission dates and reporting frequencies will be linked to project milestones and the nature of the project, as agreed upon by the Grantees and Foundation. Failure to submit reports on time may result in a pause of future payments and possible termination of the project.

Final Report:

Upon completion, a final report will summarize key findings, challenges and next steps, including materials that show results (figures, pictures, publications, etc.) as well as the final budget report.

Foundation Visits:



Foundation members (staff or Board) may wish to visit grantees to see project work under way.

Financial Accountability:

Grantees are expected to account for the moneys expended under any Foundation grant; any moneys spent either not in accordance with the approved project or prior to pre-approval of any material change in the project are both recoverable and subject to restitution by the grantees to the Foundation and may be cause for immediate termination of funding. Any funding provided beyond what is needed for the agreed upon project must be immediately reported to the Foundation. The Foundation will then advise how the funding may be directed.

Important Notes:

The Weston Family Foundation provides more than funding. Our grantees may also benefit from opportunities such as expert advice from our scientific advisors, industry exposure, networking, and internal collaboration opportunities.

Mentorship:

Depending on the scope of the project, a grantee may be paired with 1-2 experts to discuss progress, challenges with the project and receive advice on next steps in the development path. Mentors may connect with grantees at any time as required and often following the submission of a milestone/progress report.

8. Confidentiality

The Foundation treats all LOIs, proposals, projects, and associated information (collectively, the “Confidential Information”) in confidence using reasonable care in protecting such Confidential Information from disclosure to third parties who do not participate in the grant review process and Foundation assessments. All Confidential Information will be used by the Foundation and its review committee for the purposes of reviews and assessments and will be shared only in accordance with the sharing policy as set out herein. Notwithstanding the foregoing, Confidential Information shall not include any information that:

- a. was generally known to the public prior to the effective date of this Program announcement;
- b. becomes generally known to the public through no unlawful or unauthorized act by any recipient of Confidential Information; or
- c. was independently developed by the Foundation or its review committee without reference to Confidential Information.

If the Foundation or any of its review committee members is requested to disclose Confidential Information pursuant to a legal or governmental proceeding, the Foundation shall give the Applicant or other owner(s) of such Confidential Information notice of such



disclosure request as soon as is reasonably practicable. Participating reviewers will be subject to the Foundation's standard disclosure agreements for such engagements.

9. Liability and Indemnity

Each applicant pursuant to this program acknowledges and agrees in responding to the program announcement that the applicant shall have no claim against the Foundation, and its respective representatives or affiliates, should such Program response be unsuccessful for any reason. Each applicant hereby releases the Foundation, its representatives, and affiliates, from any cause of action, complaint, or claim in connection with the application process and its outcome.

The Foundation's role in grants awarded pursuant to this program is that of a funder. It is not the sponsor of funded projects. The Foundation will not assume any liability associated with funded projects and each Applicant who is ultimately awarded a grant pursuant to this Program releases the Foundation from any and all liability with respect thereto and further indemnifies the Foundation, and its respective representatives and affiliates, from any claim or loss whatsoever associated with the applicable grant.

10. Intellectual Property Policy and Intellectual Property Agreements among Collaborators

The Foundation acknowledges that any intellectual property ("IP") that arises from research funded through this program is not the property of the Foundation. The Foundation does require that applicants and collaborators agree on any material IP issues prior to submission of a proposal.

11. Applicant Commitment

Organizations and individuals affiliated with and applying through or on behalf of an organization should discuss the program announcement and the terms of this document with their organization prior to submitting an application (LOI or proposal). The submission of an LOI or a proposal does not bind either the Foundation or the applicants to any commitment to provide or receive funding, respectively. Successful applicants will be required to agree to terms substantially similar to those contained in this document and the Foundation reserves the right to alter, delete or add additional terms within the Grant Agreement between the successful applicants and the Foundation. The Foundation will not negotiate the terms of the specific Grant Agreement with applicants outside of those that are statutory in nature. The Foundation, at its sole discretion, may change the timeline of the application process and will communicate any such changes.



Foundation Definitions

Neurodegenerative diseases of aging: Alzheimer's disease, frontotemporal dementia, dementia with Lewy bodies, multiple system atrophy, Parkinson's disease, progressive supranuclear palsy, vascular contributions to the listed diseases, and prodromes to the listed diseases (e.g., mild cognitive impairment as prodromal to Alzheimer's disease; REM sleep behavior disorder as prodromal to Parkinson's disease).

Principal Applicant

- The individual or organization, with the other co-applicants, is responsible for overseeing the planning, direction, and execution of the proposed project. Only one team member can be designated as the Principal Applicant.
- The Principal Applicant is responsible for handling all correspondence with the Foundation. This includes submitting any requested information.
- If awarded the grant, the Principal Applicant is responsible for managing funds and ensuring that at least one applicant on the grant attends all assessment meetings.
- For research/university grants, the Principal Applicant must hold a position at or above the level of Assistant Professor or equivalent and be working at least 50% of the time at a CRA qualified donee institution or non-qualified donee organization located in Canada. Funds will be paid to the institution that the Principal Applicant is affiliated with and appointed at.

Co-Applicant(s):

- Individual(s) who, with the Principal Applicant, are responsible for the planning, direction, and execution of the project.
- Co-Applicants must be at the post-doctoral level or above and working at a CRA-qualified donee institution or non-qualified donee organization located in Canada.

Collaborator(s)

- Administrative or support individual(s) who can act as a contact person.
- Individual(s) or organizations who contribute substantially to the project but do not lead the work.
- Can be non-qualified donees.
- Collaborators can be working outside of Canada.
- For research projects, collaborators must be at the post-doctoral level or above.

For any questions regarding the program, please contact info@westonbrain.org.