



# **Sustainability Fund Program Guide**

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# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

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## *Description*

The purpose of the Sustainability Fund is to offer bridge funding to support research operating grant applications submitted by Alberta health researchers to the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) Open Operating Grant Program (OOGP), Foundation Scheme and Project Scheme competitions. The objective of these bridge grants is to ensure the maintenance of excellent research programs without loss of momentum, staff or trainees until the Principal Investigator has the opportunity to submit their research proposal.

Health researchers whose operating grant application to CIHR fall close to the agency's funding competition cut-off, but are not funded often intend to re-apply at the earliest possible opportunity. Submission of successful reapplications often occurs within a year of their original application, but this can leave a gap of funding. In addition, the transition at CIHR from the OOGP to the Foundation and Project Scheme competitions has created an unavoidable gap in research funding for investigators holding open CIHR awards with March 31, 2015 award end dates.

To address these funding gaps and to help sustain ongoing high quality research activity that maintains and improves Alberta-based researchers' competitiveness nationally, Alberta Innovates - Health Solutions (AIHS) provides bridge funding support through a Sustainability Fund block grant to the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary and the University of Lethbridge.

## *Goals*

The goals of the Sustainability Fund are to increase the competitiveness of Alberta's health researchers in obtaining federal health research funding and help maintain the critical capacity of the wide spectrum of highly skilled people within the academic and clinical health research environments.

## *Objectives*

The objectives of the Sustainability Fund are:

- To provide interim support to productive independent investigators who experience a lapse in funding support from CIHR due to an unsuccessful operating grant application;
- To support health research activities and/or maintain support for people who directly contribute to maintaining the momentum of the research and facilitate a more competitive grant submission;
- To enable the Universities to bridge a greater number of operating grant applications, leading to a higher percentage of successful applications from Alberta; and,
- To address funding gaps resulting from the transition of CIHR from the OOGP to the Foundation and Project Scheme competitions.

It is **not** the intent of the Sustainability Fund:

- To supplement existing operating grants;
- To cover shortfalls in approved grant support; or
- To substitute for existing bridge activity available at the Universities.

## *Use of Funds*

Each institution will use the block grants to provide Sustainability Funds to individual health researchers within the institution. Unexpended funds may be carried forward into the next year. Sustainability Funds will only be used to bridge applications to CIHR OOGP or Foundation and Project Scheme opportunities not earlier than March 2015. The Sustainability Fund will be managed through the Office of the Vice President (Research) for each university.

The total funding available for this program will be assessed on an annual basis. Funding availability for 2015/16 is \$1.2 million. This funding will be proportionally distributed as a block grant to each of the University of Alberta, University of Calgary and University of Lethbridge.

## *Sustainability Fund Evaluation*

The AIHS Sustainability Fund will be assessed on an annual basis along with the availability of AIHS funding to support the program.

Success for the Sustainability Fund will be based on meeting the program objectives measured on the basis of the following key performance indicators:

- Number of bridge grants offered by each institution in addition to the AIHS Sustainability Fund;
- Dollar amount of the AIHS Sustainability Fund bridge grant offered by each institution;
- CIHR OOGP, Foundation Scheme and Project Scheme competition success rate for each institution;
- Dollar amount of the CIHR funding obtained by recipients of AIHS Sustainability Fund bridge grants;
- Outcome of application for CIHR funding following the AIHS Sustainability Fund bridge grant;
- Success rate of applications for CIHR funding following the AIHS Sustainability Fund bridge grant; and,
- Number of highly skilled personnel supported by the AIHS Sustainability Fund bridge grant.

The Vice-President (Research) at each of the institutions will be asked to report annually on bridge grants, including the use of AIHS Sustainability Funds.

## *Application and Review Process*

Each University will define an application and selection processes that are clearly communicated to health researchers.

Each institution will work through the Office of the Vice President (Research) for the review of applications and selection of health researchers to be offered support under the Sustainability Fund according to defined eligibility criteria. Applications will be reviewed by the University receiving a Sustainability Fund allocation, not by AIHS.

The Vice President (Research) will be accountable for the use of the Sustainability Funds based on the defined terms and conditions.