



Sustainability Funding Opportunity Program Guide

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Description

The purpose of the Sustainability Funding Opportunity is to offer bridge funding for highly rated research operating grant renewal applications submitted by Alberta health researchers that are not funded in the CIHR Open Operating Grants or NSERC Discovery Grant 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 resubmit their research proposal.

Funding interruption as a result of an unsuccessful operating grant renewal application to a Tri-Council agency can have a significant and long lasting negative impact on the progress of research.

Health researchers whose operating grant renewal applications to a Tri-Council agency 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.

To address this funding gap, and to help sustain ongoing high quality research activity that maintains and improves Alberta-based researchers' competitiveness, Alberta Innovates - Health Solutions (AIHS) is providing 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 this Sustainability Funding Opportunity 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 environment.

Objectives

The objectives of the Sustainability Funding Opportunity are:

- to provide interim support to productive independent investigators who experience a lapse in funding support from a Tri-Council agency due to the non-renewal of an operating grant;
- 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 re-submission;
- to enable the Universities to bridge a greater number of unsuccessful renewal grants, leading to a higher percentage of successful re-applications from Alberta.

It is **not** the intent of the Sustainability Funding Opportunity:

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

Program Background

- A high percentage of operating grant funding is often spent on the salaries and stipends which support the research team of an independent investigator. When an operating grant is not renewed, the research can suffer a serious loss of momentum if significant time must be spent rehiring and retraining highly skilled human resources.
 - For early career investigators, the lapse in funding caused by the non-renewal of a grant may prove to be a serious detriment to overall career development.
 - For more experienced investigators, a lapse in funding can result in a major loss of activity, resulting in drastic changes to well established research infrastructure and the pursuit of long standing and in-depth lines of scientific enquiry.
 - “Research infrastructure” often includes the cohort of highly skilled people required for an investigator to perform research – trainees, research associates, technicians, etc. A lapse in an investigator’s funding may force these people to find new positions – and their knowledge and experience is lost.
- Increased application pressure without a corresponding increase in available funding makes it increasingly more difficult for Canada’s health researchers to access Tri-Council funding. It is not unusual for grant renewal applications deemed ‘excellent’ by Tri-Council peer review committees to go unfunded.
- Alberta’s ability to attract funding from national competitions has eroded steadily since the inception of the national agency in 2000, moving from about 12.5 % to less than 10% of available national resources.

Use of Funds

The total funding available for this program in 2011/12 is \$1.20 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.

Each institution will use the block grants to provide Sustainability Funds to individual health researchers within the institution.

Sustainability Funds will only be used to bridge unsuccessful renewal applications to CIHR Open Operating Grants or health related NSERC Discovery Grants for competition deadlines falling not earlier than March 2011.

Health research funding is widely distributed among departments and faculties throughout each of the Alberta-based universities. Therefore, the Sustainability Fund will be managed through the Office of the Vice President, Research for each university.

Program Evaluation

The program will be piloted for up to 3 years and evaluated prior to March 31, 2014.

Success for the Sustainability Funding Opportunity 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 Funding Opportunity
- Dollar amount of the bridge grants offered by each institution
- CIHR Open Operating Grant and NSERC Discovery Grant (in health related areas) competition success rate for each institution including renewal application success rates.
- Outcome of reapplication for grant renewal following the bridge grant.
- Highly skilled personnel supported by the bridge grant.

The VP Research at each of the institutions will be asked to report annually on bridge grants, including the use of AIHS Sustainability Funds.

REVIEW PROCESS AND CRITERIA

Application Process

Each University will use a defined 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 Funding Opportunity according to the defined eligibility criteria. Applications will be evaluated by the University receiving a Sustainability Funding Opportunity allocation, not by AIHS.

Recipients will be encouraged to revise their reapplications to integrate the comments and critique provided on their unsuccessful application proposal by the Tri-Council agency's review panel and to undergo a second internal peer review of the revised resubmission applications.

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

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Section 1 - Background

This document sets out the terms and conditions for the AIHS Sustainability Funds to be released to the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary and the University of Lethbridge. These terms and conditions are applicable to each institution and the funding recipients.

Section 2 – Definitions

- (a) "Eligible Expenditures" means those allowable costs as set out in the standards of accountability maintained by the federal Tri-Council agencies.
- (b) "Sustainability Fund" means the funds released to the Institutions from AIHS.
- (c) "Bridge Grant" means the funds approved by the Institution and released to individual recipients.
- (d) "Recipient (s)" means the individual(s) receiving a portion of the Sustainability Funding from the Institutions.
- (e) "Notification of Award" means the official notification of a transfer of funding from AIHS to the Institutions, signaling the commencement or amendment of a grant or award.

Section 3 – Transfer of Funding

Upon commencement of the Sustainability Funding Opportunity, AIHS will transfer the award funding to each Institution, to be administered according to Section 4(6) of this document (Financial Administration).

Section 4 – Grant Information

1) Term of Grant

The Sustainability Funding Opportunity period of support is effective as per the Notification of Award, but may be extended with the written consent of AIHS. Any funds remaining upon the completion of the Sustainability Fund grant will be returned to AIHS.

2) Institutional Application and Review Process

Each Institution will set up a process through their Office of Vice President, Research for the review of applications and selection of health researchers to be offered support under the Sustainability Funding Opportunity program.

3) Recipient Eligibility

Sustainability Funds are only available to health researchers who meet **all** of the following criteria:

- The recipient is a full time university-based independent investigator;
- The health researcher applied to a Tri-Council agency for a peer-reviewed, individual research grant *renewal* in the CIHR Open Operating Grant or NSERC Discovery Grant competitions within the prior year (deadline not earlier than March 2011 for the 2011-2012 allocation) and was deemed excellent but was not funded. **Note:** Since 2009, SSHRC's policy precludes agency support of social science or humanities research that is primarily intended to improve and/or increase knowledge of health, health care and health-care systems in Canada or internationally. Therefore, this grant may extend to investigators who held a health-related SSHRC grant and were unsuccessful in an application to CIHR which linked directly to the original SSHRC-supported research.
- The unsuccessful grant application to the Tri-Council agency's competition was highly ranked and deemed in the excellent range in the CIHR Open Operating Grant or NSERC Discovery Grant competitions as defined by the institution's requirements for bridge funding support eligibility. The applicant must have at least one more opportunity for reapplication of grant renewal with external agency.
- The initial renewal application to the Tri-Council agency's operating grant competition was internally peer-reviewed according to processes defined at the institution prior to submission to the Tri-Council agency.
- Recipients must provide specific plans for a future application to the VP Research.

4) Eligible Expenditures

The Institution receiving the AIHS Sustainability Fund allocation will be responsible for ensuring that the grant funds are administered according to the standards of accountability maintained by the federal Tri-Council agencies.

Any expenses occurring prior to the Sustainability Fund implementation are the sole responsibility of the individual incurring the expenses.

Eligible expenses are to include only those typical research-related operating costs for CIHR and NSERC grants.

Salary support for the PI is not considered an eligible expense.

5) Value of Bridge Grant Funding

The maximum amount that can be provided to an individual health researcher by the Sustainability Funding Opportunity is \$50,000 per grant project.

The term of the award is up to one (1) year or twelve (12) months. Sustainability funds allocated to a recipient will not be renewable.

6) Financial Administration

The Institutions will be responsible for the release of bridge grant funds to successful applicants as per the guidelines set out in the institution's Sustainability Fund grant application and review process. The funds will be managed through the Office of the Vice President, Research for each Institution.

All unexpended bridge grant funds must be returned to the Office of the Vice President, Research with the exception of costs or commitments incurred prior to the bridge grant end date.

7) Reporting Requirements

The Institutions will be required to provide an initial report that outlines the current activities focused on the support of Principal Investigators applying to Tri-Council agencies as baseline data and shall report to AIHS on an annual basis, within thirty (30) days of the end of each 12 month period ending September 1 as outlined in the Notification of Award

The annual report will provide information as outlined in Appendix A.

The Sustainability Funding Opportunity program will be piloted for up to 3 years. A review/evaluation will be conducted in Year 2 of the term of the Sustainability Fund grant. The format and process of this review will be established by the end of Year 1.

8) Performance Monitoring and Evaluation

AIHS uses a performance management framework to provide accountability for public investment in research and produces evidence of the benefits of its investments in the area of health research and innovation. Results are captured across five broad outcome categories and provide benchmarking information and reference points within and between grant programs. The framework is common to all granting programs, with a common data

set, standard definitions and guidelines while allowing for the capture of unique data elements as per the unique goals, objectives and outcomes. The information collected is consolidated across AIHS programs to generate statistics that are used to inform program planning, funding allocations to grants, monitor progress, evaluate results, identify best practices and communicate to key stakeholders. Information used in public reports and publications will be reviewed with researchers in advance.

9) Acknowledgement of AIHS Support

The Institutions shall acknowledge support from AIHS for the Sustainability Fund.

APPENDIX A: KEY PERFORMANCE METRICS

Demographic Information

Institution	Researcher Last Name	Researcher First Name	Grant Project Title	Grant ID #	CIHR Pillar(s)
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Tri-Council Grant Renewal

Tri-Council Agency	Tri-Council Grant Application Request \$	Tri-Council Competition Deadline
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Bridge Grant

Start date of Bridge Grant	End date of Bridge Grant	Bridge Grant received \$	Total # of highly skilled people supported by Bridge Fund
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