Stem Cell Network
Powering Regenerative Medicine

Réseau de Cellules Souches
Propulsons la médecine régénératrice

Early Career Researcher – Jump Start Awards - Program Guidelines

SCN will provide up to $350,000 for early-career researchers (within the first five years of an initial academic appointment) to develop a research program with a regenerative medicine focus.

Timeline:

- Letter of Intent submissions open on Tuesday, September 3, 2024.
- Letter of Intent submission deadline is Tuesday, September 24, 2024, at 11:59 p.m. Pacific.
- Full application submission will be opened to eligible LOIs on Tuesday, October 1, 2024.
- Full application submission deadline is Tuesday, December 3, 2024, at 5:00 p.m. ET (2:00 p.m. PT).

The Letter of Intent (LOI) and full application must be submitted using the ProposalCentral online submission platform.

Upon successful submission of an LOI and/or full application, a confirmation message will appear on the screen within ProposalCentral and a confirmation email from pcsupport@altum.com will be sent to the applicant. Add pcsupport@altum.com to the safe senders list to ensure receipt of submission confirmation.
If a confirmation email is NOT received from ProposalCentral within 48 hours of submission it is the responsibility of the lead applicant to contact SCN and ensure that the application package has been received by SCN.

Funding is dependent on the completion of SCN's 2025-2029 contribution agreement with the Government of Canada.

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About the Stem Cell Network:

The Stem Cell Network (SCN) is a Canadian not-for-profit that supports stem cell and regenerative medicine research; training the next generation of highly qualified personnel; and knowledge mobilization and transfer of stem cell and regenerative medicine research. From the lab to the clinic, SCN's goal is to power life-saving therapies and technologies through regenerative medicine research for the benefit of all. Created in 2001, with support from the Government of Canada, the Network has grown from a few dozen labs to more than 270 world-class research groups, supporting over 250 research projects and 30 clinical trials. Since its inception, over 25 biotech companies have been catalyzed or enhanced and more than 7,000 highly qualified personnel have been trained. In 2023, the Government of Canada announced additional funding for SCN through the Strategic Science Fund that will support SCN activities and research through to the end of the decade.

The Early Career Researcher Jump Start Awards Program:

SCN is pleased to invite proposals under the Early Career Researcher (ECR) Jump Start Awards Program. Funding through this program will support early-career researchers (i.e. researchers within the first five years of an initial academic appointment) from the fields of health, bio-engineering and social sciences who are seeking to establish a regenerative medicine research program. To be eligible for funding, proposed research projects must have a regenerative medicine focus and the potential to move along a translational pathway.

Research activities can include but are not limited to: development of new regenerative medicine models; expression and epigenetic studies to understand behavior of stem and progenitor cells for health or disease; generation of unique datasets; proof-of-principle experiments; identification and characterization of compounds/drugs that target stem cell fate and function with the aim to develop novel therapeutic approaches. In addition, projects that have a bio- or tissue-engineering focus and are relevant to regenerative medicine are in-scope for this program.

For ECRs wishing to pursue research related to the ethical, legal and social implications of regenerative medicine, work may include but is not limited to: regulatory modernization;

legal and policy challenges of emerging technologies; ethical governance; market access pathways; reimbursement; health system adoption; patient knowledge and engagement; privacy; data collection and usage; public education or awareness for consumers.

Early Career Researcher Jump Start Awards are for up to $350,000 each for 36 months (award term is April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2028). Full applications will require a strategic plan and a budget justification that corresponds with the plan. In addition, a separate detailed budget for the requested SCN funding is required. Partnerships with companies/industry, not-for-profit organizations, foundations, charities, research institutions/hospitals/universities, and government bodies are a valuable component of project proposals. Partnerships and leveraged funding (in-kind and/or cash) will increase the application's ranking. In addition, applications that include collaborations with other Canadian-based investigators and have multidisciplinary expertise will also be ranked more highly. Those applications that are reflective of EDI considerations through hiring/team composition, training and scientific methodologies will also be given a higher ranking.

Specific Criteria:

- Applicants must be early career researchers (ECRs) from the health, bio-engineering and social sciences who are within the first 5 years (60 months) of an initial academic appointment. SCN follows Tri-Agency guidelines regarding ECR status, which currently provide a COVID-19 pandemic related two-year extension to applicants who held ECR status between March 1, 2020 and September 15th, 2022.
- Projects can focus on developmental or high-risk, innovative regenerative medicine research that has the potential to be translated in the coming years. Please note: applications must clearly articulate a translational pathway for the research.
- Projects can also focus on the policy, regulatory or ethical issues relevant to regenerative medicine research.
- Innovative research activities can include but are not limited to: development of new regenerative medicine models; expression and epigenetic studies to understand behavior of stem and progenitor cells for health or disease;

generation of unique datasets; proof-of-principle experiments; identification and characterization of compounds/drugs that target stem cell fate and function with the aim to develop novel therapeutic approaches. In addition, projects that have a bio- or tissue-engineering focus and are relevant to regenerative medicine are in-scope for this program.

- Include non-federal partnerships that provide in-kind and cash contributions.

General Requirements:

- Projects must be relevant to regenerative medicine; regenerative medicine is the branch of medicine that develops methods to regrow, repair or replace damaged or diseased cells, organs or tissues. Regenerative medicine includes the generation and use of therapeutic stem cells, tissue engineering and the production of artificial organs. Research applications that are focused on cancer must be regenerative in nature and/or use stem cells for addressing the proposed problem.
- Projects must demonstrate research excellence, inclusive principles, Canadian leadership, and innovation.
- Projects must clearly describe the potential impact of the proposed research and how it will open new avenues that lead to health, economic or social benefits for Canadians.
- Project milestones and deliverables must be realistic and reasonable based on the supporting budget.
- International collaboration is also encouraged to strengthen the research activity and potential global impact.
- Projects must include a robust Highly Qualified Personnel (HQP) training plan that integrates trainees and facilitates meaningful exposure and development across the spectrum of project disciplines.
- Projects must include a knowledge mobilization plan and describe how the research will be made accessible to knowledge users outside of academia. Please note it is expected that the Tri-Agency Open Access Policy will be followed to ensure research results are made publicly accessible.
- Projects must include a description of the best practices and measures that will be adopted to ensure robust, unbiased, and reproducible results, including any

laboratory/project management, data governance, good documentation practices and how demographic variables, such as sex, gender, ethnicity or age, are integrated into the research. Note: All proposed research should be conducted in accordance with the Tri-Agency Framework: Responsible Conduct of Research.

- All applications must include a plan that describes the project Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) considerations for hiring/team composition, training, and scientific methodologies.
- Sex and Gender in Research Training: Applicants must have completed and obtained certificates for the three courses comprising the CIHR Online Training Modules: Integrating Sex and Gender in Health Research.
- Research Security: Applications must comply with the federal government's Policy on Sensitive Technology Research and Affiliations of Concern (STRAC Policy) and the National Security Guidelines for Research Partnerships (NSGRP). Refer to SCN's Guidance on Research Security for SCN Funding Applications for details.

Eligibility Requirements:

- Investigators requesting funds from SCN must be based at a Tri-Agency eligible institution and must themselves be eligible to receive Tri-Agency funding.
- Each project must be distinct from any other application(s) submitted to SCN to avoid 'double dipping' across SCN's research funding programs.
- An applicant is limited to act as lead investigator on only one LOI submission and project application per program.
- To receive funding, successful applicants must execute a standard SCN Agreement, and take on all the associated rights and obligations. These obligations include the requirement to provide SCN office with project reports as requested, and recognition of SCN as a funder.

Evaluation Criteria:

Applications to this program will be evaluated on the following criteria using SCN's two-stage peer review process. In addition to the regenerative medicine focus of the project, the following criteria will be evaluated:

1. Scientific Innovation and Merit
2. Project Rigour and Feasibility
3. Quality of the Team
4. Budget
5. Knowledge Mobilization Plan
6. Highly Qualified Personnel Training Plan
7. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Plan
8. Translation and Commercialization Plan
9. Partner Support

General information about SCN's Cycle 5 Round 1 competition:

Regenerative medicine projects that are eligible for SCN funding centre on one or more of the following topics: 1) Developing or testing therapeutic approaches that are regenerative in nature, including cell and/or gene therapies; 2) Addressing the role and function of stem cells in a tissue or disease; 3) Using stem cells as a necessary component for the generation of functional cell types; or 4) Investigating a small molecule or biologic that acts on or is dependent on endogenous stem cells for its therapeutic effect.

SCN values the individual differences, lived experiences, expertise, and knowledge of those in the community regardless of age, ancestry, culture, physical ability, gender identity, race, religion, or sexual orientation. SCN realizes that diversity of perspectives produces more impactful research relevant to all Canadians, therefore all applications must include a plan that describes the project Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) considerations for hiring/team composition, training, and scientific methodologies.

All applications to SCN funding competitions are treated as new applications. If a project was submitted to a previous SCN funding round, it is at the applicant's discretion to address any issues raised in prior peer review feedback. Peer reviewers will not be provided access to prior peer review feedback for any previous version of an application.

Eligible applications will be reviewed through an expert scientific peer review process, comprised mainly of international reviewers. Projects will then be considered for strategic fit with SCN's mandate by the Research Management Committee (RMC), and funding

decisions will be taken by the Board based on RMC recommendations. Successful applicants will provide the SCN office with project and financial reports as requested, and projects will be regularly monitored through SCN's continual review process. During this process, the RMC will evaluate whether appropriate progress is being made, including the timely attainment of milestones and deliverables, and will make recommendations on the continuance of funding. Projects that do not make appropriate progress may have funding withheld or terminated, while those that exceed progress expectations may be considered for additional top-up support, should funds be available. More details regarding SCN's peer and strategic review process can be found here.

Submission process for the Early Career Researcher Jump Start Awards program:

A Letter of Intent (LOI) submission is mandatory for this program. LOIs will be used to identify peer review requirements, gauge the level of interest in SCN's programs, and ensure projects fall within SCN's regenerative medicine mandate. Eligible LOIs will be invited to submit a full application on Tuesday, October 1, 2024.

LOI and full application-related questions should be addressed to Gustavo Scola or Jon Draper (researchSCN@stemcellnetwork.ca).