



# STAR

STRENGTHENING  
ADMINISTRATION  
OF RESEARCH

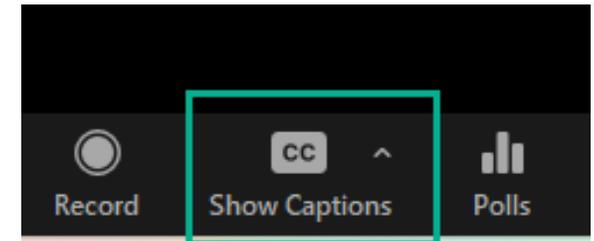
## Guidelines in Action - Practical Steps in Engaging & Compensating Research Support Workers

Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:30-11:30 am

- **Renee Brost**, Chief Administrative Officer, Division of the Vice-President, Research & Innovation (VPRI)
- **Drew Gyorke**, Director, Agency & Foundation Funding, VPRI
- **Renee Cheng**, Senior Procurement Officer – Research Portfolio, Procurement Services
- **Lisa Haley**, Manager, Immigration & Compliance Programs, People Strategy, Equity & Culture

# Reminders

- We will be **recording** today's session.
- Slides and recording will be shared following the session.
- **Minimize distractions** to focus on learning!
- As needed, move your body (stretch, stand up) so that you can stay focused.
- Please mute your audio and turn off your video.
- We will have time for questions at the end of the session. **Please type your questions into the chat box.**
- **Turn on captioning** if needed.



# Access Check

Access is a shared responsibility between everyone in this space. In doing this together, we strive to welcome disability, and the changes it brings into this space for learning and growth.

If there is anything that may affect your participation in this session, please use the Zoom chat to send a private chat message to **Won Yoo**

# Land Acknowledgement

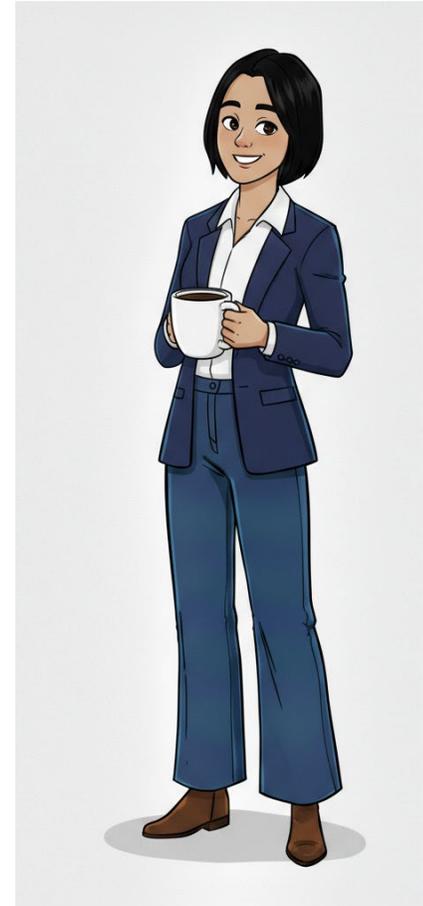
"I (we) wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land."

# Agenda

1. Meet Professor Ali
2. Introduction: Guideline on Engaging & Compensating Research Support Workers
3. Overview of the Guideline
4. Research Funding & the Guideline
5. Procurement: Engaging Research Support Workers
6. Out of Province/Out of Country Considerations
7. Review: Key Points
8. Questions & Answers

# Meet Professor Ali

- Professor Ali is a researcher in sustainable materials engineering
- Frequently enlists a range of research support workers
- Loves to drink coffee from her oversize mug
- **Goal:** To help Professor Ali make informed decisions when engaging research support workers



# Introduction

U of T is committed to an academic community where learning and scholarship thrive. To achieve these aims the university is committed to supporting domestic and international research activities in ways that are:

- lawful
- compliant with public sector financial requirements
- aligned with funding restrictions in research grants/awards

# Introduction

*Continued...*

- **Purpose of Guideline**

To help Principal Investigators (PIs) correctly categorize, engage, and compensate research support workers.

- **Scope of Guideline**

Applies to all research support activities involving the flow of funds, including work occurring outside Ontario.

- **Ways to Engage Research Support Workers**

- *Employing* research support workers
- *Sub-granting research funds* to external institutions or Co-Investigators
- *Contracting* external expertise or advisory services

# Exploring the Guideline

Developed as a resource for PIs to use when considering hiring research support workers

- Helps PIs make preliminary assessments as to the type of relationship and how to pay the support worker
- Outlines basic sub-granting and procurement processes, specifying which office to contact for further assistance

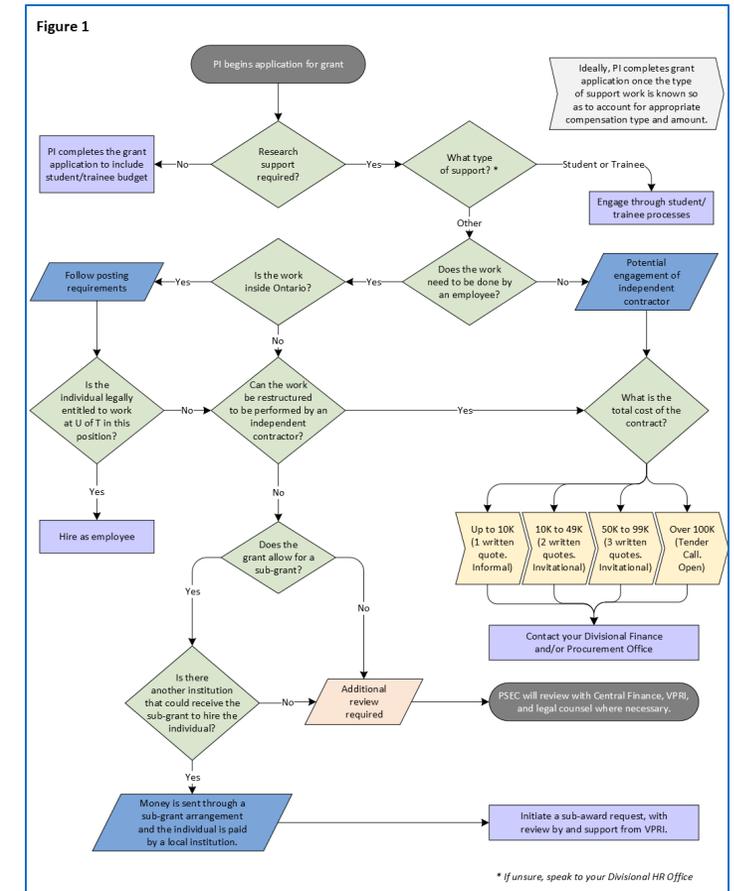
Includes links to other resources, such as:

- Determining employment vs. independent contracts
- Engaging international support workers
- Hiring Out of Province/Out of Country
- Understanding the engagement process through a Flow Chart in the appendix



# Understanding Ways to Engage Research Support Workers

- How to help PIs understand how to properly engage research support workers
- Distinguishes process if researcher support worker is a student/trainee, employee, independent contractor
- Distinguishes between work undertaken inside Ontario and outside
- If a subgrant is not possible, and the work is properly employment, contact the PSEC Immigration group



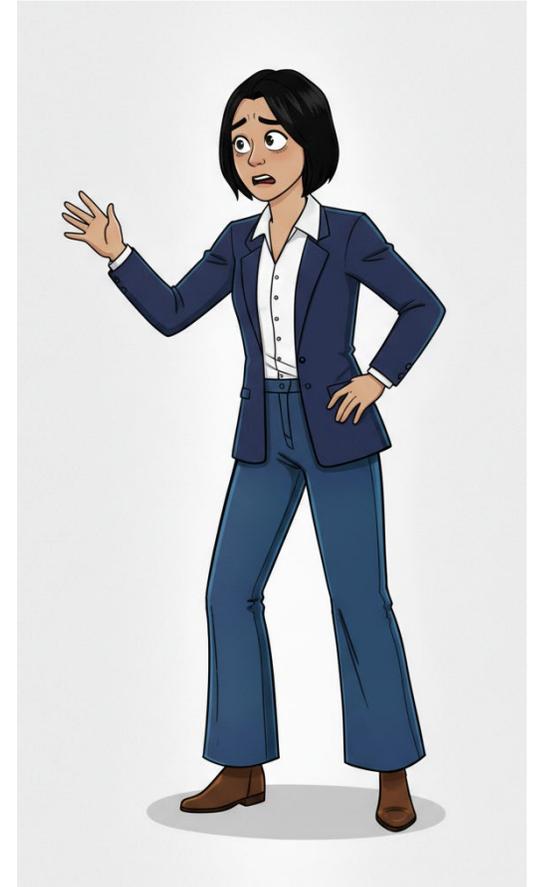
# Comprehension Check 1

## Employee or Independent Contractor?

Professor Ali's lab hires a retired professor, Dr. C, to provide expert peer review for three specific grant applications over two months. Dr. C will be attending the weekly lab meetings, and will only be working for U of T. She is seeking your help as she is unsure how to correctly categorize Dr. C for hiring purposes.

Under the guideline, Dr. C would be categorized as (Select one):

- a. An employee
- b. An independent contractor



# Research Funding & Research Support Personnel

- Research support personnel normally includes:
  - **Students & trainees:** Undergraduate, graduate students, postdocs
  - **Other:** Non-academic staff such as project managers, and consultants and contractors where their expertise is required for a portion of the project.
- Applicants include research personnel costs in their application submissions following the sponsor's budget eligibility rules.

# Research Funding & Research Support Personnel

*Continued...*

- Funds awarded to the U of T PI may be shared with any named Co-Investigators (responsible for the academic direction of a part of the project), where permitted by the sponsor.
- The mechanism to transfer funds to a Co-Investigator including for hiring research support personnel is the **sub-grant** mechanism.
  - The Co-Investigator incurs eligible costs and recruits research support personnel following their respective institutional policies and procedures.
  - Common for Tri-Agency and many other sponsors' awards.

# Research Funding Rules

*Continued...*

- In addition to eligible research support personnel costs, the **role** of collaborators named on the grant determine if a sub-grant agreement is possible or not.
- While some sponsors, including SSHRC, NSERC, CIHR and other sponsors have specific role definitions, other sponsors do not. For example:
  - A SSHRC Co-Investigator can receive sub-grants; Collaborators cannot.
  - International-based faculty cannot be a Co-Investigator on SSHRC Insight Grants but can be Collaborators.
  - NSERC Discovery Grants are for the PI and there are no Co-Investigators. Collaborators are permitted, but funds cannot be sub-granted to Collaborators.

# Research Funding Rules

- A PI who holds a SSHRC Insight Grant **can** sub-grant to their Co-Investigator but **cannot** sub-grant to a **Collaborator** inside or outside of Canada:
  - The Co-Investigator can pay for their research support personnel using the sub-granted funding.
  - A **Collaborator** cannot pay their research support personnel with SSHRC funds because they are ineligible for a sub-grant.
  - **BUT:** Our PI wants the expertise of their **Collaborator's** PhD student, so can the PhD student be "recruited" as an independent contractor or consultant? **No.**
    - **Why?** Because U of T would not be compliant with sponsor rules and, the student or trainee's institution will want their own rules to apply (e.g. protection of IP, thesis publication, and definition of whether they are using institutional or their own independent resources.)

# Research Funding Rules: TIPS

When planning for a research application, it is important to:

- Understand eligible **roles** and how those roles influence **eligible expenses** as defined by the sponsor.
  - This has a direct influence on whether a sub-grant is possible.
- Obtain clarification from RSO (Research Services Office) or IPO (Innovations & Partnerships Office) *and/or* the sponsor.
- Where a sponsor does not permit funds to flow to a named collaborator, hiring the collaborator's students via the independent contractor option is not a valid alternative.
- Independent contractors or consultants, where permitted, are engaged via Procurement at UofT or a Co-Investigator's respective institution.

# Comprehension Check 2

## Research funding

Professor Ali holds an NSERC Discovery Grant. In year 2, Professor Ali meets a US-based colleague who has two amazing PhD candidates who focus on creating sustainable materials from coffee agriculture byproducts. Can Professor Ali hire the students as research support personnel? (Select one)

- a) Yes, as independent contractors
- b) No, either via subgrant or contractor
- c) There is now a 1,000 percent tariff, so no (999 percent? No problem)



# Procurement

- Procurement: When Employment and Sub-grants Are Ruled Out
- What to know when engaging suppliers
  - Overview of U of T's procurement policy
  - Large and lower dollar value purchases (\$121,200 threshold)
  - Approval Authority Schedule (AAS)
- Non-consulting vs. consulting services: research focused examples
- Key resources & contacts

# Procurement: When Employment and Sub-granting Are Ruled Out



Procurement processes apply only after it is confirmed that the work cannot be performed through Employment or Sub-granting.



Where independent contracting is appropriate, the PI must follow required procurement processes to engage the individual.



All procurement processes must comply with the BPS Procurement Directive, the U of T Procurement Policy, and applicable legislation.

# Overview of U of T's Procurement Policy

The University's [Procurement Policy](#), revised on *November 26, 2025*, is governed by a framework of:

- internal policies
- applicable legislation
- regulations
- domestic and international trade agreements

This framework ensures that procurement activities are **fair, open, transparent, and compliant**, and that public funds are used in a way that demonstrates value for money.

For more details, visit the [Procurement Services Website](#).

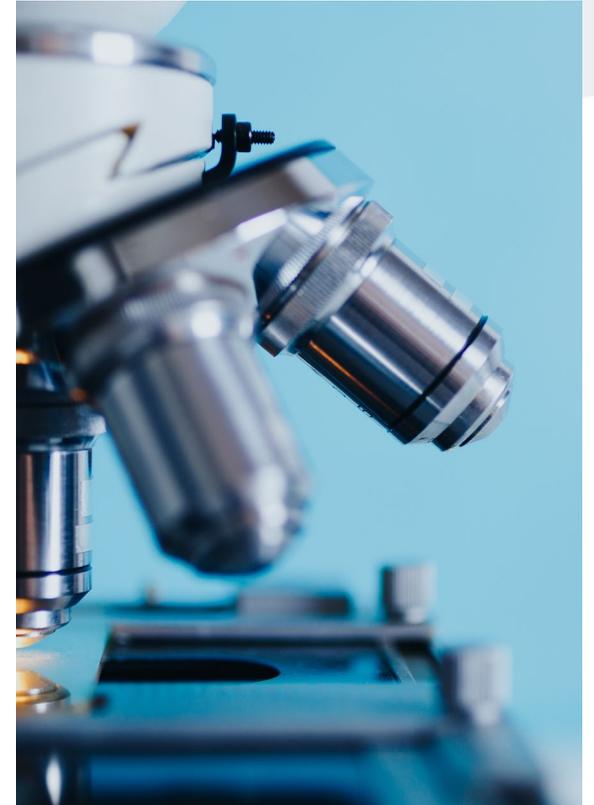


# Large Dollar-Value Purchases (\$121,200+)

**Minimum Planning Time: 6+ Months**

## Open Competitive Procurement Phases

- Procurement Lead assigned
- Define requirements
- Publicly post the procurement opportunity
- Evaluate proposals
- Negotiate agreement
- Execute contract and post award notice



# Large Dollar-Value Purchases (\$121,200+)

*Continued...*

## **Additional Time to Consider**

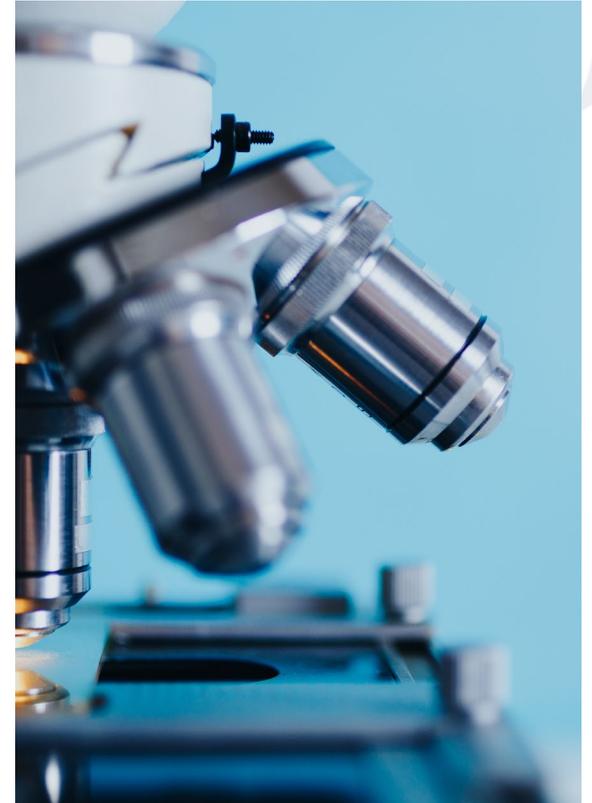
- Manufacturing lead times
- Shipping and delivery delays

## **Key Takeaway**

- Start planning months - or even a year - before your funding deadline.

## **Need help?**

Engage your local procurement team early.



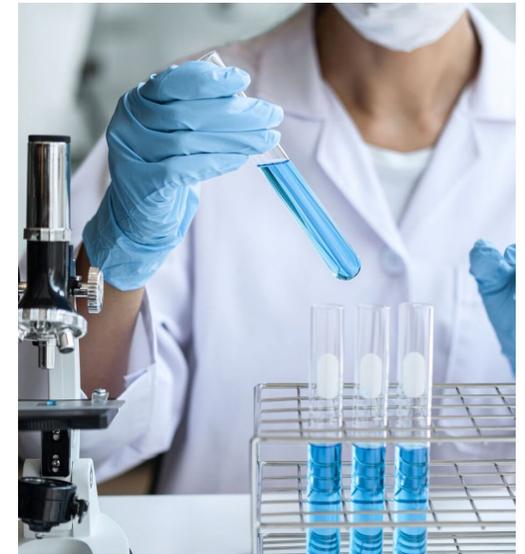
# Lower Dollar-Value Purchases (< \$121,200)

## What's Different

- Open public procurement not required below \$121,200
- Policy requirements differ for Consulting Services compared to Goods, Non-Consulting Services, and Construction/Renovations
- Procurement approach depends on total dollar value

## Know Your Thresholds

- Requirements increase as dollar value increases
- Approval levels may change



# Lower Dollar-Value Purchases (< \$121,200)

*Continued...*

## Using Approved Suppliers

- You can often reduce administrative effort by purchasing from **Approved Suppliers** in the University Approved Supplier Directory.
- These vendors are pre-vetted and meet University compliance standards.
- But remember:
  - **Funding agency rules** may still require multiple quotes, even if the supplier is approved
  - **CFI/ORF-RI purchases** should not use [uSOURCE](#), even for Approved Suppliers



# Approval Authority Schedule (AAS)

## Applies to Goods, Non-Consulting Services, Construction & Renovations.

In accordance with the Broader Public Sector (BPS) Procurement Directive, effective April 1, 2024, and as amended from time to time, the University formally adopts the following approval thresholds, effective February 1, 2026

Procurement Type	Total Procurement Value (before taxes)	Means of Procurement	Approval Required
Goods, Non-Consulting Services, Construction and Renovations			
Informal	\$0.00 - \$24,999.99	uSOURCE Catalogues, or University PCard <sup>1</sup> , or Invoice Payment, or Purchase Order	Budget Owner or designate
Invitational Competitive	\$25,000.00 - \$74,999.99	uSOURCE Catalogues, or Purchase Order to an Approved Supplier, or Purchase Order with a minimum of two quotes attached	Budget Owner or designate
	\$75,000.00 - \$121,199.99	uSOURCE Catalogues, or Purchase Order to an Approved Supplier, or Purchase Order with a minimum of three quotes attached	Budget Owner or designate, plus Contracting Authority <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Purchases made with the University's Procurement Card (PCard) are subject to a \$10,000 limit per transaction and must adhere to the procedures outlined in the Guide to Financial Management.

<sup>2</sup> Procurement activities at or exceeding \$75,000.00 must be reviewed and approved by the Contracting Authority that provides procurement services to the Budget Owner.

# Approval Authority Schedule (AAS)

Applies to Consulting Services:

Procurement Type	Total Procurement Value (before taxes)	Means of Procurement	Approval Required
Consulting Services			
Invitational Competitive	\$0.00 - \$74,999.99	Purchase Order with a minimum of two quotes attached	Budget Owner or designate
	\$75,000.00 - \$121,199.99	Purchase Order with a minimum of three quotes attached	Budget Owner or designate, plus Contracting Authority <sup>2</sup>
Open Competitive	\$121,200.00 +	Open Competitive Procurement Process	Budget Owner or designate, plus Contracting Authority <sup>2</sup>
Non-Competitive	\$0.00 - \$999,999.99	Procurement Policy Exemptions Justification with Purchase Order, as appropriate	President
	\$1,000,000.00 +	Procurement Policy Exemptions Justification with Purchase Order, as appropriate	Business Board

*Note: Consulting Services provide expert or strategic advice for consideration and decision-making, distinct from Professional Services, which involve fee-for-service work performing specific tasks under client direction. Examples include management and policy consultants.*

For more details, visit the [Procurement Services Website](#).

# U of T Contracting Authorities

**Contracting Authorities:** Designated units responsible for procurement within defined scopes and approval thresholds (AAS).

## **Contracting Authorities:**

- **St. George – Procurement Services:** Campus-wide goods & services (excluding F&S and UPDC)
- **UTM – Procurement Services:** Goods, services, construction, facilities, and infrastructure
- **UTSC – Financial Services:** Goods, services, construction, facilities, and infrastructure
- **Operations & Real Estate Partnerships – Financial Strategy & Services:** Building operations and maintenance undertaken by Facilities & Services (St. George)
- **Operations & Real Estate Partnerships – University Planning, Design and Construction (UPDC):** Capital projects, renovations, and infrastructure

# Calculating Total Procurement Value

**Formula:**



**Sample Calculation:**

$$\$25,000.00 + \left[ \$10,000.00 \times 5 \right] = \$75,000.00$$

Note: Total procurement value is calculated before taxes and over the full term of the contract. It includes all base fees, options, renewals, and any one-time costs. Total procurement value is used to determine which procurement threshold and process applies.

# Non-Consulting Services Examples



## Defined research or technical tasks

Operational or technical work carried out under established protocols or researcher direction.



## Data preparation and research support

Transcription, coding, or data preparation completed to specified instructions.



## Information retrieval and digitization

Locating, scanning, or compiling materials based on predefined criteria.

# Consulting Services Examples



## **Strategic advisory support for research initiatives**

Providing expert advice or recommendations to inform institutional decisions on research direction, approach, or priorities.



## **Development of research frameworks or strategies**

Designing and recommending research-related plans, models, or approaches for institutional consideration or approval.



## **Evaluative advice on research collaborations or partnerships**

Analyzing potential research partnerships or initiatives and advising on their value, risks, or alignment with University objectives.

# Key Difference: Non-Consulting vs. Consulting

**Non-consulting services** means under fee-for-service arrangement to perform specific tasks at the direction of the University for a limited period of time.

**Consulting Services** means the provision of expert knowledge and advice by an experienced professional or entity, typically for a fee and not under an employment agreement. These services are delivered in an advisory capacity only, offering strategic or specialized guidance to support considerations and decision making.

# Comprehension Check 3

## Consulting vs. Non-Consulting

Professor Ali owns a sensitive research product with potential commercial value. She engages an external expert to assess institutional risks related to commercialization and provide recommendations to senior leadership on whether and how the University should be involved. She has a lot on the go and quickly needs your advice in correctly classifying this service.

**How should this service be classified? (Select one)**

- a. Non-consulting services, because the research product is owned by the PI
- b. Non-consulting services, because the product is sensitive in nature
- c. Consulting services, because the scope involves expert advice to inform University-level decisions
- d. Non-consulting services, because commercialization activities are specialized



# Comprehension Check 4

## Procurement Approach

Professor Ali wants to hire a service provider for expert advice on assessing institutional risk and recommending actions for new or changing regulatory requirements affecting research. The total procurement value is ~\$71,000 (pre-tax). Before approaching Procurement, Professor Ali conducted a preliminary market scan using professional networks and publicly available information, identified several firms providing general compliance or risk advisory services, and documented why the other identified firms could not meet the full scope of requirements. Based on this assessment, Professor Ali believes only one supplier has the required expertise and requests to proceed with a non-competitive approach.

**Considering the procurement thresholds, which of the following approaches should Professor Ali use? (Select one)**

- a. Treat it as non-consulting services and issue a PO with two quotes attached (invitational competitive). Approval: Budget Owner.
- b. Treat it as consulting services and issue a PO with two quotes attached (invitational competitive). Approval: Budget Owner.
- c. Proceed as non-competitive consulting: Complete a Procurement Policy Exemptions Justification (PPEJ) form and obtain approval from the President.
- d. Proceed as non-competitive consulting: Complete a Procurement Policy Exemptions Justification (PPEJ) approved by one level higher than the Budget Owner.



# Key Procurement Resources & Contacts

Procurement Services is available to assist with questions or to help determine the appropriate procurement approach for specific purchases.

## **Procurement - St. George Campus**

All requests and inquiries for St. George campus are now handled through ServiceNow.

Please [submit a ticket](#) for procurement assistance.

## **U of T Procurement Services Website**

<https://www.procurement.utoronto.ca>

## **Resources**

[Procurement Policy](#)

[How to Purchase Goods and Services](#)

[Open Competitive Procurement](#)

[Research Procurement](#)

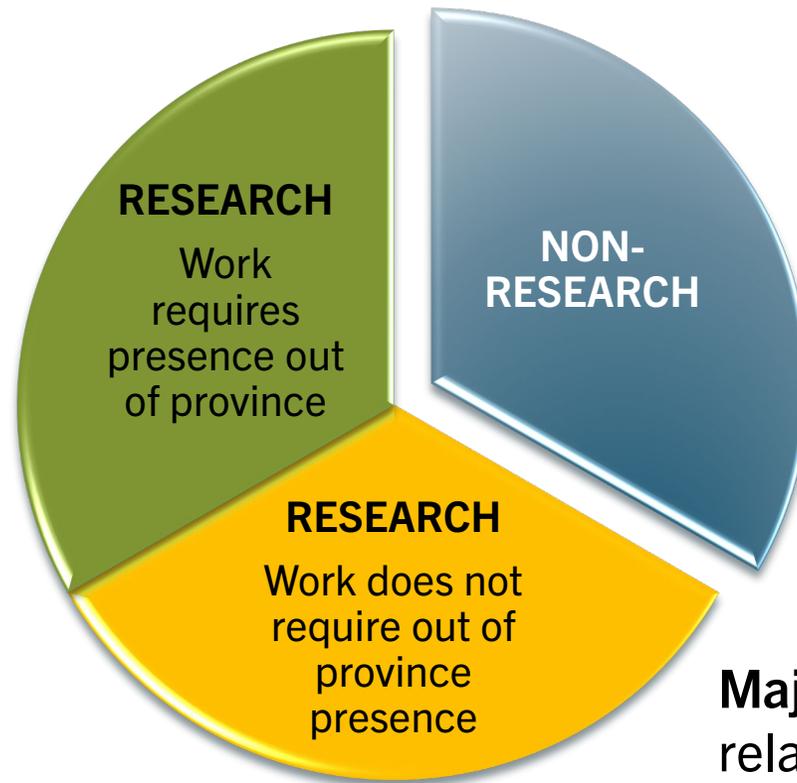
[Invitation to Quote – CFI-Funded](#)

[Tools, Templates, and Forms](#)

And more....

# Out of Province/Out of Country Approvals

These are generally approved in 6-month intervals (e.g., on-site archival work, archaeological digs, etc.)



Not permitted; NB: several high-profile searches in this space have resulted in failed hires due to top candidates preferring to remain in their home province.

**Majority of requests are in this category;** related to casual USW research support (e.g., online research, data entry, etc.)

# Out of Province Risks

- Legal Considerations & Employment Laws
  - Differences between provincial legislation including Health & Safety regulations, minimum wage, overtime thresholds, statutory holidays
- Limited risks associated with benefits entitlements (health & dental, life or long-term disability insurance, severance and termination entitlements, University Pension Plan as province of employment is deemed to be Ontario)
- Security and Data Privacy
- Possible Income tax liabilities: payroll deductions are based on the province of employment, but actual tax liability is based on your province of residence

# Out of Country Risks

- Legal Considerations & Employment Laws
  - Conflicts with different countries' legislation (i.e., local employment laws)
- Health & Safety
- Tax and Regulatory Compliance
  - Failure to comply with tax laws, regulations, and reporting requirements
  - Can only pay in CAD

- Benefits and Pension –
  - Not eligible for health & dental
  - LTD issues if doctor is not licensed to practice in Canada
  - UPP Pension – must be Canadian resident to join
- Intellectual Property (IP) Protection and Security and Data Privacy

# Comprehension Check 5

## Case Study

Professor Ali wishes to hire a USW casual worker for one year. This worker wishes to conduct their research from Michigan for 6 months. The candidate is Canadian. The research involves working closely with faculty and staff at the Indigenous-led Technoscience Research Unit at U of T to ensure the ethical integration of local Indigenous knowledges and values into research design for materials discovery and applications. To help Professor Ali navigate this situation, help her with the issues below. (Please enter your answers in the chat)

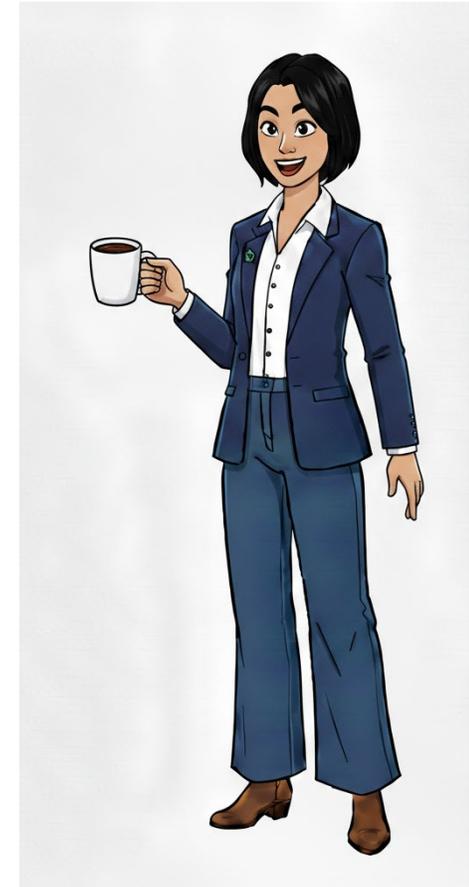
1. **Name two risks in this scenario.**
2. **Would the assessment change if the work were done from another Canadian province instead of the U.S.?**



# Comprehension Check 5 - Answers

## Risks

- **Concerns for work in the U.S.:** contravening local employment laws, ineligibility for health and dental, possible double taxation, fines or penalties for UofT for operating outside their jurisdiction
- **Concerns for work outside Ontario:** Variations between Ontario and other provincial legislation concerning health and safety regulations, minimum wage, overtime, statutory holidays, potential higher tax liability, severance payment differences



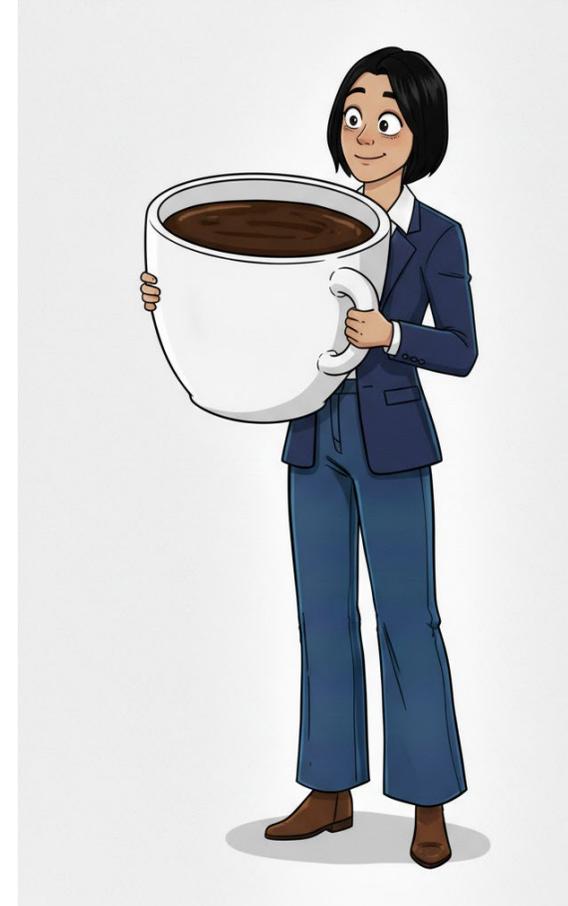
# Key Takeaways

- Bring the Guideline to the attention of PIs wishing to engage research support workers
- Be aware of the risks of work outside of Ontario; contact HR Immigration
- When procurement is required after employment and sub-granting have been ruled out, and independent contracting is deemed appropriate, the PI must follow the required procurement processes to engage the service providers. All procurement processes must comply with the BPS Procurement Directive, the U of T Procurement Policy, and applicable legislation.
- Review sponsor guidelines, particularly eligible roles and expenses, when preparing an application and contemplating who your collaborators will be.

# Resources, Help & Support

- [Guideline on Engaging and Compensating Research Support Workers](#)
- [Immigration – The Division of People Strategy, Equity & Culture](#)
- [Division of the Vice-President, Research & Innovation](#)
  - Sponsor eligibility rules on research awards (for Tri-Agency, Tri-Agency Guide to Financial Administration, or "[TAGFA](#)", noting program specifics can override TAGFA)
- [Research Procurement – Procurement Services](#)

Thanks to your help with understanding the guideline, Professor Ali feels much more comfortable in categorizing, engaging and compensating research support workers.



# Questions & Answers





# Post-Workshop Knowledge Assessment Quiz

# Feedback, please!





# Thank you!