

# Early Researcher Award Round 18 Information Session

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Presented by: **Division of the Vice-President, Research and Innovation**

May 28, 2024, 2:00pm-3:00pm EST

We will begin shortly. We ask that you kindly mute your microphone throughout the session.

## Land Acknowledgement

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.

# Housekeeping, Submitting Questions, Accessible Participation

- This session will be recorded, and slides will be shared following the session.
- Please leave your microphone on mute throughout the presentation
- Use the chat window to ask any questions. Questions will be answered in order at the end of this session.
  
- MS Teams supports live captioning. Please feel free to utilize this option.  
Follow: 'More' ► 'Language and speech' ► 'turn on live captions'
- If you have any accessibility needs or concerns, please email [rso.vpr@utoronto.ca](mailto:rso.vpr@utoronto.ca)

# Agenda

- 1. Eligibility and Budget Tips**  
Samantha Young, Research Funding Officer, Research Services
- 2. Preparing a Successful Application: Tips and Common Weaknesses**  
Andrea Day & Emma Doran, Editorial and Proposal Development Officers, Research Services
- 3. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Commitments**  
Andrea Gill, Research Equity & Development Strategist, Research Services
- 4. Research Security and Completing the "Mitigation Economic and Geopolitical Risk Checklist"**  
Colin Baulke, Research Security Advisor, Research Security
- 5. Reference Letters and Deadlines**  
Samantha Young, Research Funding Officer, Research Services
- 6. Q&A**



# Eligibility and Budget Tips

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# Eligibility of the Principal Investigator

- Full-time faculty members who, at the application submission deadline of Thursday, July 25, 2024, are based at an eligible institution and have;
- **Completed their first PhD, MD, DVM or terminal degree** on or after **January 1, 2013**
- **Started their independent academic research career** on or after **January 1, 2018**
  
- Eligible interruptions must be clearly described in the application. Use all the allotted space. Specific dates are required.
- Continued education and required training (e.g., medical training and medical fellowships), maternity/parental leave, and medical leave are considered eligible interruptions.
- Research Associate positions, post-doctoral fellowships and time spent in industry are not considered eligible interruptions.

# Eligible Expenditures

- **\$100,000 ERA** plus **\$50,000 matching** are eligible to support the Research Team of undergraduates, graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, research assistants, research associates, and technicians carrying out the research.
  - Salaries and benefits
  - Essential and reasonable travel and expenses related to conferences, workshops, or seminars, and offsite research activities
  - Associated expenses related to the research team (record checks, job advertisements, publication costs, lab user fees)
  - Discretionary expenses of up to \$7,500 to fulfill the objective of the program to build research talent
  - Youth outreach activities may use up to 1% (\$1,000) of the funding provided by the Ministry to complete the annual Youth Outreach requirement.

# Ineligible Expenditures

- Funds received cannot be spent on the following:
  - Salary, benefits, or expenses of the Principal Investigator
  - Purchase of supplies or equipment
  - Operation of equipment and facilities
  - Salaries, benefits, or expenses of Visiting fellows, ineligible team members, or individuals performing contract research (where the contractor owns the intellectual property)
  - Travel and accommodation for recruitment purposes
  - Any items or services not directly related to the project
- Outsourcing youth outreach activities, hospitality/catering costs, honoraria to co-op or summer students, or the development of media to supplement an event (books, magazines, websites etc.)



# Eligible Institutional Matching Contributions

- Matching funds must adhere to the “eligible/ineligible expenditures” listed in the guidelines.
  - **All matching funds must be student compensation and/or student travel expenses**
- Eligible funds:
  - university scholarships for undergraduate/ graduate students, such as departmental awards or the University of Toronto Fellowships
  - Internal awards, such as Connaught funding
  - charities or foundation funding
  - private or public sector contributions that is in cash
- Internal Matching Letter must be submitted along with the application package.
  - letter template is available on the Funding Opportunities page for [ERA Round 18](#)

# Ineligible Institutional Matching Contributions

- Any in-kind contribution
- Teaching assistantships
- Start-up funds from the institution intended to assist newly appointed faculty members launch their research careers
- Funding through federal granting councils (NSERC, CIHR, SSHRC, etc.)
- Funding from Ontario government ministries and agencies, and funds leveraged by such research awards
- Funding received through Ontario Genomics or Genome Canada
- Ontario Graduate Fellowships and Ontario Graduate Scholarships, any other Ontario funds

- 3 ○ Total Discretionary expenses up to \$7,500, used to carry out the project, provided it fulfills the objective of the program of building research talent
- 2 ○ Total Youth Outreach Activities should be no higher than \$1,000
- 4 ○ Total Institution's Matching Contribution totaling \$50,000
- 1 ○ Total Direct Costs totaling up to \$150,000 (this includes the Funds from the Province for Direct Costs along with the Institution's Matching Contribution)
- 5 ○ Total Ministry-funded Overhead Costs totaling up to \$40,000

	Team Member *	Expenditure *	Year 1 *	Year 2 *	Year 3 *	Year 4 *	Year 5 *	Total	
	Doctoral student	Direct Costs – Salary and Benefits	\$22,000						-
	Total Direct Costs – Salary and Benefits								+
	Doctoral student	Direct Costs – Travel and Accommodation	\$5,000						-
	Total Direct Costs – Travel and Accommodation								+
	Doctoral student	Direct Costs – Associated Expenses	\$1,500						-
	Total Direct Costs – Associated Expenses								+
3		Direct Costs – Discretionary Expenses *max of up to \$7,500	\$1,300						\$7,500 maximum
	Total Direct Costs – Discretionary Expenses								
2		Direct Costs – Youth Outreach *max of up to \$1,000	\$200						\$1,000 maximum
	Team Member *	Expenditure *	Year 1 *	Year 2 *	Year 3 *	Year 4 *	Year 5 *	Total	
1	Total Direct Costs		\$30,000					\$150,000	
5	Overhead Costs		\$8,000					\$40,000	
	Total Expenditures		\$38,000					\$190,000	
4	Total Institution's Matching Contributions		\$10,000					\$50,000	



# Preparing a Successful Application

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# ERA Reviewers

## Who is my audience?

- Multidisciplinary peer-review panel
  - May or may not include experts in your field
- ORF Advisory Board
  - Final decision-making body
  - Includes academics and non-academics

## Write for your audience.

- Avoid technical jargon/ discipline-specific terminology
  - Use clear, straightforward language
- Explain any necessary technical terms/concepts
- Give the big picture
  - Why is this research significant?

# Evaluation Criteria

- Excellence of the Researcher (40%)
- Quality of Research (30%)
- Development of Research Talent (20%)\*
- Strategic Value for Ontario (10%)\*

\* These sections are especially important.



# Build a Competitive ERA Application

- Write for a multidisciplinary audience.
  - Define key terms and spell out any acronyms and/or initialisms when they first appear.
    - E.g., "X Condition (XC) is an incurable, chronic condition caused by Y and Z."
- Present a research plan that is clear, original, project-focused, and with a defined significance.
  - Illustrate the scope of the problem your research addresses and situate this problem in the literature.
    - E.g., "X disease is a global health challenge that significantly impacts health, reduces quality of life, shortens lifespans, and places a \$X burden on the Canadian health system each year" [ref].
  - Situate your methods in the literature.
    - E.g., "While the use of X method for Y purpose in my research and others' has been well described [refs], application to Z problem remains scarce. Therefore ..."
  - Use signposting structurally and at the sentence level.
    - Use subheadings to delineate the knowledge gap your work addresses, your preliminary work, your hypothesis, the work's feasibility, and its significance.
    - Include a list of numbered objectives in your introduction, and explicitly link the project's methods to these objectives throughout the proposal, e.g., "Animal surgeries will be used to assess X's efficacy in Y (Obj. Z)."

# Build a Competitive ERA Application, cont.

- Develop a training plan aligned with your research objectives and that will give HQP unique experiences and skills.
  - E.g., "MSc Students 1 and 2 will perform X and Y duties (Obj. Z), learning A and B skills."
  - E.g., "The opportunity for HQP to use X equipment and develop Y skill is not available elsewhere in Ontario, making my program particularly attractive to trainees with an interest in Z."
- Clearly demonstrate the value to Ontario and knowledge transfer channels.
  - Use subheadings that reflect the types of benefits outlined in the Application Guide, i.e., Commercialization Benefits, Economic Benefits, and Societal and/or Cultural Benefits, as applicable.
  - Quantify the value of your outcomes, e.g., "Costs associated with X disease are on the rise in Ontario and expected to reach \$Y by 20xx. My research will ..."
- Demonstrate your strong record of independent research and funding (avoid submitting too early).
- Collect enthusiastic reference letters from international research leaders.
- Include specific/concrete EDI considerations.



# Common Weaknesses

## Excellence of the Researcher

- Candidate was just appointed, and this application is premature
- Candidate has had limited experience training/supervising HQP.
- Candidate has modest record of competitive grant funding.
- Candidate has moderate record of publications.

## Quality of Research

- Research project is too broad in scope: lacks specific objectives and measures of success.
- Research plan is not clear and/or needs more methodological details.
- Research plan has little information about analysis of results.
- Research plan lacks originality.

# Common Weaknesses, cont.

## Development of Research Talent

- Plan to supervise trainees is not clear and/or does not address opportunities for career development.
- Trainees will not play a significant role in the research.
- Candidate has limited experience in terms of training (often because the candidate was recently appointed, and the application is premature).

## Strategic Value for Ontario

- Statement of strategic value is not clear./Proposal does not make the case that the research will create significant economic benefits for Ontario or enhance the province's academic profile.
- The research will contribute to Ontario in a limited extent.
- Statement of strategic value is realistic; however more detail could have been provided.

# Tips for Revising the Application

- Consult the Research Service Office's [ERA Tip Sheet](#).
- Space is tight: revise for **coherence, clarity, and concision**.
- Have peers (especially previously successful applicants) review the proposal for academic content. Ask peers outside your discipline to read it for clarity and persuasiveness to a multidisciplinary audience.
- **Triple check:** Have you followed all the ERA instructions, including those for attachments? Correct formatting is **essential**.



# Commitment to Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

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# EDI Expectations in the ERA Application

- **ERA Guidelines:** The research project should meaningfully engage members of underrepresented groups within the research and development team.
- Assessed under the Development of Research Talent criterion (20%):
  - The applicant must clearly demonstrate their commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) when developing their research teams.
- A failure to demonstrate commitment to EDI was among the common weaknesses identified by the program in the last round
- Commitment to EDI goes beyond describing the diversity of current trainees
  - Do not disclose demographic/identifying information about trainees

# Addressing EDI Expectations

- Space is very tight — avoid broad/general statements
- Describe **specific, concrete practices** to advance EDI in training
- Tailor these actions to the size/context of the team
- If possible, address equity, diversity, *and* inclusion
  - Describe plans to equitably **engage/recruit a diverse group** of trainees
  - Indicate how you will create **equitable training/mentoring opportunities**
  - Describe actions to **create an inclusive environment** and foster a sense of belonging among all trainees

# Commitment to EDI – 12. Training Plans for the Research Team

- **Instructions:** The PI must clearly demonstrate the commitment to EDI in their research teams
- Convey specific actions **concisely**
  - “To engage a diverse group of trainees, I will openly post all opportunities and encourage applications from under-represented groups”
  - “All those involved in selecting trainees will complete unconscious bias training and will fairly consider academic interruptions.”
  - “I have regular one-on-one meetings with all trainees, and each trainee completes an individual development plan.”
  - “My trainees and I participate in ongoing EDI training to build key competencies in this area.”
- Integrate EDI within the text section — use signpost phrasing when describing key skills and activities
  - “To ensure equitable to access to opportunities, all PhD students will be provided with . . .”
  - “I will promote equity in mentorship by ensuring that all trainees will have the opportunity to . . .”

# Commitment to EDI – Appendix B: Proposed Research

- Describe the integration of EDI considerations in your research design and practices.
  - Research design: how the research questions, methods, analysis, knowledge mobilization, etc., integrate sex/gender and other diversity factors
  - Research practices: actions/policies to foster EDI within the team/group of trainees
- Explain how you will increase equitable and inclusive participation in your research team
  - Describe **specific, concrete** practices (expand on points raised in Section 12)
  - Practices to engage a diverse group of trainees (e.g., advertise widely, engage in targeted outreach, implement fair and consistent selection process)
  - Practices to create equitable training/mentorship opportunities (e.g., consistent onboarding, equitable access to opportunities, use of mentoring plans and mentoring networks, one-on-one meetings)
  - Practices to foster an inclusive team environment (e.g., team code of conduct, flexibility and accommodation in scheduling, accessible and inclusive spaces and meetings, sharing UofT EDI and wellness resources)
- For examples of specific actions, consult the RSO [EDI in research handbook](#).





# Mitigation Economic and Geopolitical Risk Checklist

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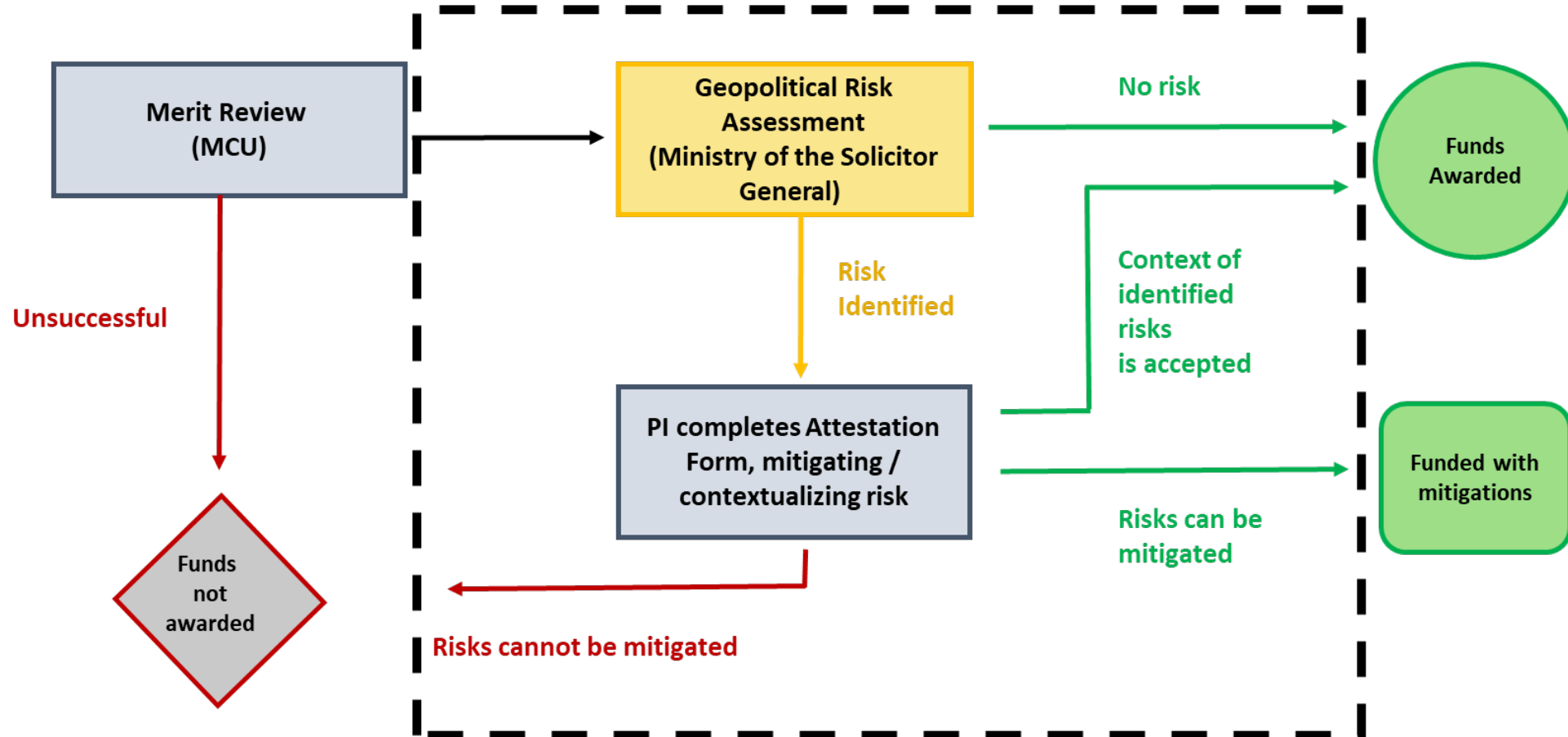
# Government of Ontario

- All Ontario Research Fund applications require the [Mitigation Economic and Geopolitical Risk Checklist](#) to be completed
- This process assesses both **partners (both academic and industry)** and **researchers** for connections to **entities considered high security and/or geopolitical risk.**
- The Ontario review process assesses for risks **beyond those identified by the federal STRAC policy** and requests applicants provide information on ongoing partnerships and external collaborations, including of co-authored papers, at the time of application.
- The Ontario process now includes an **attestation process**. If a risk is identified by the government during the application review, researchers will be invited to complete an **attestation form** to contextualize or provide mitigations for the identified risk

# Geopolitical Risk Assessment Process: Ontario Research Fund



= New review processes  
circa summer 2023





# Reference Letters and Deadlines

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# Reference Letters

***DUE to Research Services Office by Tuesday, June 25, 2024.***

## Who are my referees (3)?

- Two (2) arm's-length sources referees
  - No personal link, not a colleague
  - Should be researchers of **international stature**
- One (1) non-arm's-length referee
  - Former supervisor/mentor/collaborator/corporate sponsor

Names of referees and a short biography are in **section 18** of the Ministry's application form.

## What should my referees address in their letters?

- Best practices and guidance on writing the letters can be found on the Ministry's Program Guidelines and should be shared with your referees
- Be sure to provide your referees with your research proposal, full CV, and background material on the ERA program
- Follow **specific formatting** instructions on pages 17-18 of Round 18 Application Guidelines

Contact your referees as early as possible (i.e., NOW!)

Letters are crucial for demonstrating your standing in the field

Common Weakness:  
Reference letters not arm's-length

# Reference Letters: Submission

## Can I mail or fax my reference letters?

No. Referees must **email** their letters **directly** to Research Services ([nazifa.tabassum@utoronto.ca](mailto:nazifa.tabassum@utoronto.ca) and [rso.vpr@utoronto.ca](mailto:rso.vpr@utoronto.ca)).

## What if my reference letters don't arrive in time?

We recommend requesting an additional reference letter or two to account for this situation (reaching out to 4-5 potential referees). If your application does not include the three reference letters by the deadline, your application will be deemed incomplete.



# ERA Round 18 Application Deadlines

## Internal Notice of Intent – HAS PASSED.

**Friday, May 17, 2024.** The NOI deadline has now passed. If you have not submitted an NOI and intend to apply for the Round 18 ERA program, please email [nazifa.tabassum@utoronto.ca](mailto:nazifa.tabassum@utoronto.ca) and [rso.vpr@utoronto.ca](mailto:rso.vpr@utoronto.ca) ASAP.

## Reference Letters

**Tuesday, June 25, 2024.** All three letters must be received by RSO by this date. Letters are to be sent directly to RSO ([nazifa.tabassum@utoronto.ca](mailto:nazifa.tabassum@utoronto.ca) and [rso.vpr@utoronto.ca](mailto:rso.vpr@utoronto.ca)) by referees, they must not be sent to the applicant.

## My Research Application + Application Package

**Tuesday, July 9, 2024.** Applicants must submit:

- 1) A complete application package and UofT matching letter to RSO via email
- 2) An application through MRA (My Research Application). Please provide enough time for your Chair and Vice-Dean Research to review your application. Suggest submitting no later than one week *prior* to the deadline.

# Completed Application Package is due to RSO by Tuesday, July 9, 2024.

- **Document 1: Electronic Copy of Application Form\***
  - Appendix A – Total Expenditure Budget
  - Appendix B – Proposed Research
  - Appendix C – CV (Research Productivity and Recognition)
  - Appendix D - Reference Letters\*\*
- **Document 2: Flat PDF of Application Form**
- **Document 3: Mitigation Economic and Geopolitical Risk Checklist**
- **Document 4: U of T Internal Matching Letter** (for internal processing only, not included with Ministry application)

**Please email your application package to Nazifa Tabassum and RSO ([nazifa.tabassum@utoronto.ca](mailto:nazifa.tabassum@utoronto.ca) and [rso.vpr@utoronto.ca](mailto:rso.vpr@utoronto.ca)).**

\* The Ministry has uploaded a new version (“Version 2”) of the Application Form; please ensure you use the correct version

\*\* Reference letters will be collected by the Research Services Office; we will consolidate them with your Application Package



# Contact Information & Links

## Research Services Contacts

Nazifa Tabassum, Research Funding Administrator ([nazifa.tabassum@utoronto.ca](mailto:nazifa.tabassum@utoronto.ca))

Research Services Office, VPR ([rso.vpr@utoronto.ca](mailto:rso.vpr@utoronto.ca))

Samantha Young, Research Funding Officer ([samanthak.young@utoronto.ca](mailto:samanthak.young@utoronto.ca))

## Research Security Contacts

Colin Baulke, Research Security Advisor ([colin.baulke@utoronto.ca](mailto:colin.baulke@utoronto.ca))

Research Security General ([research.security@utoronto.ca](mailto:research.security@utoronto.ca))

## Funding Opportunities Website

<https://research.utoronto.ca/funding-opportunities/db/early-researcher-award-era-round-18>

*Includes ERA Program overview, deadlines, program guidelines, application form, UofT matching letter, tips sheet, and more!*



**Questions?**

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