Brain Canada

Request for Expressions of Interest

Platform Support Grants for the Neurosciences

Brain Canada intends to announce later in 2013 an open funding competition for Platform Support Grants (PSGs). The purpose and type of funding of PSGs is explained in the draft Request for Applications (RFA). The concept of the PSG is to contribute to the support of operating costs of national or regional research platforms that would serve large numbers of researchers in the neurosciences. In particular, Brain Canada hopes that the PSGs will make possible the coordination and linking of existing local, provincial, or regional infrastructure into a national platform. A key requirement is that the grant from Brain Canada and its partners will improve the capabilities and accessibility of research platforms, and not substitute for existing sources of funding. PSGs are not intended to support the capital costs of new equipment or facilities.

Examples of possible national platforms might include:

- A clinical trials network for neurological diseases or mental health problems that would adopt standardized protocols, contract formats, and pooled data management systems, attracting increased numbers of trials to Canada. Such existing networks include the Canadian HIV Trials Network\(^1\), the AllerGen Clinical Investigator Collaborative\(^2\), the NCIC Clinical Trials Group\(^3\) and the Consortium of Canadian Centres for Clinical Cognitive Research\(^4\).

- A consortium of existing brain banks, with common standard operating procedures and curation practices, a unitary database of available material, and improved communications strategies to increase tissue donations. Existing banks include the Brain Tumour Tissue Bank\(^5\), the Douglas - Bell Canada Brain Bank\(^6\), and the Maritime Brain Tissue Bank\(^7\).

- A national repository of linked data from many different types of investigation, including clinical, imaging and genomic data. The Brain-CODE project of the Ontario Brain Institute is an example of such a repository\(^8\).

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1 \[http://www.hivnet.ubc.ca/about-us/mission/\]
2 \[http://www.allergen-nee.ca/documents/File/NCIC Clinical Trials GroupFast%20Facts/11_CIC.pdf\]
4 \[http://www.c5r.ca/\]
5 \[http://www.braintumour.ca/184/brain-tumour-tissue-bank\]
6 \[http://www.douglas.qc.ca/page/brain-bank?l=e\]
7 \[http://anatomy.medicine.dal.ca/brainbank.htm\]
8 \[http://www.braininstitute.ca/brain-code\]
This document describes a consultation process between Brain Canada and its stakeholders, particularly researchers in the neuroscience and mental health research community, research-performing institutions, and research-funding organizations, including corporations. The outcome of the pre-launch consultation will be a RFA and competition process that is finely-tuned to deliver a funding program that will be of maximum benefit to Canadian brain research, and to Canadians actually and potentially affected by neurological and mental health disorders.

### About the Canada Brain Research Fund

The Canada Brain Research Fund is a public-private partnership designed to encourage Canadians to increase their support of brain research, and maximize the impact and efficiency of those investments. The Fund was announced in federal budget 2011, which proposed to “allocate up to $100 million to establish the Canada Brain Research Fund, which will support the very best Canadian neuroscience, fostering collaborative research and accelerating the pace of discovery, in order to improve the health and quality of life of Canadians who suffer from brain disorders.”

Brain Canada has committed to raising $100 million from eligible partners, which will be matched by government on a 1:1 basis. Eligible partners include health charities and other not-for-profit organizations, provincial government departments and agencies, universities, hospitals and research institutes, foundations, private donors, and for-profit corporations.

The combined investment will fund research in ways that will accelerate the translation of basic research into new diagnostics, treatments and ultimately cures. Brain Canada will encourage all organizations raising funds for brain research to contribute directly to the fund and have their donor dollars matched, and/or to partner on research programs to further leverage the public-private match.

Partnering with the Canadian Association for Neuroscience, Brain Canada has developed a national research program that will support areas of the greatest potential and need. Brain Canada believes that a collaborative approach to research will accelerate the translation of research discoveries into prevention, treatment and cure. Its approach will be to focus on the brain as a single complex system, rather than a collection of distinct diseases. Brain Canada has launched competitions for the Multi-Investigator Research Initiative and Training Awards. Platform Support Grants are the third component of its research strategy.

### Why is Brain Canada asking for EOIs?

The aims of the Expressions of Interest (EOI) process are three-fold:

1) To get advice about the content of the RFA, so that when announced the PSG RFA best meets the needs of the neuroscience community and potential funding partners.

2) To gauge the interest of possible funding partners in joining with Brain Canada in supporting national/regional research platforms in the neurosciences.
3) To receive informal proposals from groups/consortia/alliances/networks of researchers for support through this funding scheme, in order to stimulate discussion about collaboration and rationalisation of proposals.

The EOI process is entirely informal and does not commit interested parties or Brain Canada to any specific actions or financial support. Please read the attached draft RFA carefully before sending an EOI. Your input may take a number of forms, such as making specific comments about details of the RFA, expressing potential interest in being a funding partner, or suggesting a specific type of national platform.

**Who can send an Expression of Interest (EOI)?**

EOIs may be sent by any interested parties, including:

- Neuroscience and mental health researchers, as individuals or teams, who have an informal concept, proposal, or suggestion for support of an existing national/regional platform order to enhance its usefulness or performance; or for the assembly of a national platform through the combination of existing local and regional resources.

- Institutions performing health research, with an interest in partnering with Brain Canada, and which would benefit from a PSG to enhance existing national or regional platforms; or from proposed alliances of institutions that would use a PSG to aid in assembling a national platform from existing resources.

- Funders of health research, including voluntary health agencies, provincial governments and provincial health research organizations, charitable foundations, and individual donors, who may be interested in partnering with Brain Canada in the establishment of national platforms, or for the support of local or thematic components of a broader national platform.

- Federal departments and agencies are also encouraged to provide EOIs on alignment between their support of national platforms and that of Brain Canada, and the potential for coordinated support.

- Professional associations, and health care organizations and administrators, working in the clinical brain and mental health sciences, who may wish to identify existing or absent research platforms of importance in meeting their needs for evidence-based practice, and optimum delivery of related health services.

- For-profit firms and corporations interested in an opportunity to leverage existing investments in research platforms accessed by Canadian health researchers, or to establish new partnerships in support of national research platforms.
- Institutional research administrators or technology transfer officers who may have concerns related to the operation of the PSGs, or ideas for increasing their impact on commercialization or other avenues of application to practice.

- Advocates for health research, both individuals and organizations, who may wish to advise about their perceptions of gaps or unmet needs for national research platforms in the neurosciences and mental health.

- Consortia of any of the above.

**How do I send an EOI?**

EOIs should take the form of a letter sent as an email attachment to the President of Brain Canada, on institutional/organizational/company letterhead where applicable. The letter should:
- explain the reasons for the interest in the proposed PSG
- outline how a PSG could benefit the interested party or the researchers that it supports
- if proposing a potential or actual national platform, briefly describe: the role and structure of the platform; how the PSG would be used to enhance an existing platform or assemble a new one; the amount of support required; where that support would come from; and explain how the platform would benefit neuroscience and mental health in Canada
- suggest changes to the draft RFA that would make the PSGs better suited to meet the needs of the neuroscience and mental health research community.
- where appropriate, suggest other parties that should be interested in the concept or proposal for a PSG
- provide full contact details of the person submitting the EOI.
- **indicate if the EOI is confidential (see below).**
- Unless the EOI is confidential, provide a maximum 20-line summary of the EOI as a separate document, suitable for posting on Brain Canada’s website. If you do not wish to provide a summary, Brain Canada will create one.

Brain Canada suggests that EOIs should not exceed 3 pages in length, excluding the summary. Supplementary material should not be included. Instead, hyperlinks may be provided in the text of the EOI to organizational websites, reports, or references that are relevant to the EOI.

EOIs should be sent by email to PSG.EOI@braincanada.ca, with the EOI and its summary as two separate .pdf file attachments. Brain Canada will acknowledge receipt of the EOI within three working days.
What will Brain Canada do with my EOI?

1. Open Publication and Dialogue

EOIs will be treated as public documents unless the party providing them indicates that they shall be confidential. In order to encourage early dialogue and collaboration between interested parties, Brain Canada will post summaries and contact information for each EOI received on a PSG discussion forum as they are received. An EOI may also be disclosed to other parties who may be interested in its content for the purpose of collaboration, rationalisation of proposals, or funding partnerships. The content of confidential EOIs will not be published or shared with other parties without the permission of the person who submitted it.

2. Response

Brain Canada staff will carefully review each EOI, and may refer EOIs to members of its Scientific Advisory Council for comment and advice. Brain Canada will respond to each EOI within a reasonable time. In its response to the interested party, it may:
- recommend that interested parties collaborate in producing a letter of intent;
- advise that an idea or proposal does or does not align with the PSG program;
- provide advice about how a promising proposal could be revised to align better;
- explain how the RFA has been amended to take into account the comments received;
- invite potential funding partners to contribute to the continued drafting of the RFA so that it reflects their aims, and to negotiate the terms of a partnership;

3. Follow-up

Depending on the scope and number of EOIs received, Brain Canada may arrange, meetings, teleconferences, and webinars at which concepts, proposals and partnerships suggested by certain interested parties can be more fully developed prior to the submission of applications. It may set up a special area of its website or social networking functions where interested parties can continue dialogue with Brain Canada and each other. It may also decide to delay launching the PSG competition until critical issues raised by the EOI process are resolved.

When can I send my EOI?

EOIs may be sent immediately to PSG.EOI@braincanada.ca. The latest date for sending an EOI is May 20th, 2013.

Where can I see other EOIs, or comment on other suggestions?

Summaries of EOIs and contact information will be posted to the PSG discussion forum, http://braincanada.ca/forums. You may comment on anything that appears on the forum.
by sending your comment to PSG.EOI@braincanada.ca. Note that this is a moderated forum and your comments may be edited or deleted if, in the opinion of Brain Canada, they are inappropriate. The authors of comments will be identified, and anonymous comments will not be accepted.

I have a question…. 

Please contact PSG.EOI@braincanada.ca. Your question may be posted (with identifiers removed or paraphrased) on the PSG discussion forum, unless you indicate that the question and its answer are confidential.