EXPLORE RESEARCH PROGRAM

Frequently Asked Questions



Fit & Purpose

What type of research is the Explore Research Program designed to support?

The Explore Research Program ("Explore") supports forward-looking research from different disciplines that anticipates emerging societal challenges and advances knowledge in priority topic areas identified by CSA Group. Projects are expected to address novel questions, examine uncertain or underexamined areas, and contribute to the broader CSA Group research initiative scope, addressing critical gaps and questions on the topic to provide long-term societal benefit.

How does this program differ from other research funding programs?

The Explore Research Program funds multiple complementary projects within a shared research initiative, with an emphasis on collaboration, knowledge sharing, and long-term impact beyond individual projects. Funded teams are expected to participate in cross-project engagement and to contribute to collective insights facilitated by CSA Group. The program also explicitly encourages interdisciplinary perspectives, including disciplines not traditionally associated with the topic area.

Why is CSA Group investing in the projects within the Explore Research Program?

The Explore Research Program will help CSA Group identify and better understand emerging issues that may become relevant for standards in the future. Insights from funded projects may help inform future standards development priorities, activities within CSA Group such as the CSA Core Research Program and CSA Public Policy Centre, and the work of CSA Group committees or task forces. Ultimately, the research initiative topics chosen align with issues that have significant implications for the future in Canada and represent areas where CSA Group and its collaborators can have a positive impact in the years to come.

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Do projects need to address standards readiness?

No. Projects do not need to present a standards readiness component or demonstrate a direct connection to standards. Because the Explore program addresses topics of interest for CSA Group 5-10 years in the standards future, projects with a high degree of standards readiness may be too near-term for the forward-looking scope of Explore.

What kinds of research projects are not a good fit?

Projects may be less competitive if:

1. They do not clearly align with the research initiative identified in the Call for Proposals
2. They are already highly mature or close to implementation, with limited exploratory value
3. They depend on unconfirmed external funding to proceed as proposed
4. Research teams cannot meaningfully participate in collaborative and knowledge-sharing activities due to a high degree of proprietary information or confidentiality restrictions
5. Their main focus is the advancement or commercialization of a specific tool or technology
6. A significant proportion of time and/or money is allocated to the development of a specific knowledge mobilization output (e.g., an exhibition or an app)

Applications that do not articulate forward-looking impacts or broader relevance to the initiative are also unlikely to be a good fit.

Does my project need to connect to the posted topic?

Yes. All proposed projects must clearly and directly contribute to the CSA Group research initiative topic identified in the Call for Proposals. Applicants are expected to make a compelling case for how their project advances knowledge, solutions, and/or cross-disciplinary understanding within that research initiative, including consideration of longer-term implications over the next decade. CSA Group welcomes project proposals that thoughtfully examine less common paths and/or challenge dominant paradigms.

What if our team's discipline is not typically associated with the topic?

Use your proposal to explicitly explain and justify the connection to the research initiative topic. CSA Group welcomes proposals from all fields, provided applicants can demonstrate a clear, credible link between their work and the research initiative's goals and impacts.

The research initiatives aim to investigate both the technical and human dimensions of the issues at hand, so researchers from non-technical fields, such as social sciences and humanities, are encouraged to apply. All applicants are welcome to apply, as long as they describe a clear, rigorous research methodology and aim to generate new insights or evidence that can enable potential solutions.

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Are projects limited to the sample research questions provided?

No. The sample research questions are provided for guidance only. Applicants are encouraged to propose their own research questions, including those that extend beyond the examples provided. All applications must clearly explain how the proposed research aligns with and contributes to the overall objectives of the research initiative identified in the Call for Proposals.

Do proposals need to specify a Technology Readiness Level (TRL)?

No, proposals do not need to include a TRL. However, applicants developing or advancing a specific technology may choose to reference a TRL if it meaningfully applies to their project.

CSA Group Involvement

What is the role of a CSA Group Explore Research Manager?

A CSA Group Explore Research Manager will be assigned to each project team for regular communication on program progress, direction, and status. This individual will be responsible for overall management of the initiative and communications from CSA Group, as well as developing Research Insight Reports. The Explore Research Manager will be the Principal Investigator's (PI's) first point of contact for any questions related to the research funding. It is requested that the research team direct questions to the Explore Research Manager through their PI.

How will CSA Group engage with project teams during the project?

CSA Group will actively engage with funded project teams throughout the project period to support alignment, collaboration, and knowledge integration within the broader research initiative. The CSA Group Explore Research Manager who will facilitate regular communication, including quarterly progress meetings, workshops with other funded teams, and integration of project findings into initiative-level Research Insight Reports. This engagement is intended to support knowledge sharing, cross-project learning, and exploration of the broader implications of research findings, while respecting confidentiality and intellectual property considerations.

Who owns the intellectual property (IP) arising from the research?

CSA Group will not own the intellectual property in research-related outputs and publications (e.g., journal articles, conference presentations, theses and dissertations). CSA Group may request a license for use of the content of research-related publications in CSA Group Research Insight Reports.

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How should CSA Group funding be acknowledged?

CSA Group may request that publications and research outputs arising from Explore-funded projects acknowledge CSA Group support, in accordance with typical publication practices.

Who will write Research Insight Reports?

These reports will be written by CSA Explore staff and will draw insights from Explore-funded projects, with attribution. The purpose is to synthesize knowledge across projects with a forward-looking lens and discuss the future implications at a macro level. PIs will be provided with an opportunity to review Research Insight Reports prior to publication.

How long will CSA Group use project findings in Research Insight Reports?

CSA Group may continue to draw on project findings for Research Insight Reports and related initiative-level outputs as long as they remain relevant, which may extend beyond the funding period.



Evaluation & Selection

What criteria are used to evaluate proposals?

Proposals are evaluated based on four core criteria: quality of the proposed research, fit to the research initiative topic, feasibility, and research team excellence. Reviewers assess the originality and significance of the proposed research, the clarity and rigor of the research design, the project's alignment with the research initiative and its potential cross-disciplinary impact, the feasibility of the work plan and budget, and the expertise and contributions of the research team.

Who reviews the applications?

All applications are reviewed through a peer review process that includes external subject matter experts selected by CSA Group, as well as CSA Group staff. External reviews are conducted using a double-blind approach to promote fairness and objectivity. CSA Group staff contribute programmatic and strategic assessment related to alignment with the research initiative and the broader objectives of the Explore Research Program.

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How is applicant anonymity supported through the double-blind peer review process?

External subject matter experts will only be provided with the information included in the Project Proposal section in the application portal, i.e., project title; keywords; executive summary; background and project motivation; research questions, objectives, and contributions; methodology and workplan; risk mitigation; and relevance and cross-disciplinary impact. Applicants should avoid including personal identifying information in these sections. Although complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed, these measures are intended to support a fair and impartial review process.

What is requested under the Feasibility criterion?

Researchers should demonstrate how the proposed research project is feasible, such as the research approach, methodology, and that the team and facilities associated with the application are well-suited to completing the project as described. This includes a well-formulated Risk Mitigation component that identifies potential barriers or risks to success and how the team will proactively address them to maintain research progress. Examples of project risks may include challenges related to technical development, participant recruitment, data access, or other project uncertainties. General research issues, such as hiring qualified research personnel or maintaining laboratory safety, are not project-specific risks and should not be included in this section.

What is the review timeline?

Key dates for each research initiative are available on the Explore program website.

Are early-career researchers (ECRs) eligible to apply?

Yes, researchers at all career stages are welcome to apply. The research team's merit will be evaluated with respect to career stage. There is no preference for applications that do or do not include ECRs.

Will I be penalized for uncertain status of renewable grants?

No. Some funding programs, such as NSERC Discovery Grant, require periodic renewal. Applicants will not be penalized under the feasibility criterion for including relevant funding that they will have to renew within the Explore program period. However, Explore research activities are expected to advance even if future grant renewals are unsuccessful.

Will applicants receive individualized feedback if they are not selected?

No. While all applications undergo a thorough review, individualized feedback will not be provided to unsuccessful applicants. Applicants are encouraged to carefully review the Call for Proposals and application guide to ensure strong alignment with program objectives and evaluation criteria.

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Funding

My project will require more than $150,000. Can I request more?

No. The maximum funding available through the CSA Explore Research Program is $150,000 per project over two years, and a maximum of $75,000 per year. Applicants may combine Explore funding with support from other sources provided that the proposed project is feasible and able to proceed as planned regardless of the status of other funding. Some research teams may be invited to apply to renew their funding for an additional two years; however, they are still required to meet the terms of the two-year funding agreement.

Can a project request less than $150,000?

Yes. However, a budget significantly below $150,000 may be an indicator that the project's scope does not meet the desired criteria for this program.

What types of expenses are eligible or ineligible?

The Explore Research Program supports direct research costs that are necessary to carry out the proposed work and are consistent with the Tri-Agency Guide on Financial Administration, with some exceptions. Eligible expenses generally include research personnel (e.g., graduate/undergraduate student researchers, postdoctoral researchers, and research assistants), travel directly related to the research, materials and supplies, publication fees, and other typical research costs.

Ineligible expenses include indirect costs or overhead; salaries for the PI, co-PI, or collaborators; teaching/course buyout; and large equipment purchases. Applicants should design their projects to use existing infrastructure or alternative arrangements when access to large pieces of equipment is required. If you are unsure whether a proposed expense is eligible, applicants are encouraged to contact the Explore Research team in advance of submission.

Who can receive funds?

Explore funding may be held and administered by the PI and, if applicable, one designated co-Principal Investigator (co-PI), both of whom must be based at a Canadian not-for-profit or public research institution, meet the program's eligibility requirements, and enter into a funding agreement with CSA Group.

Collaborators may not receive funds directly from the Explore Research Program. Collaborators may be based at institutions, organizations, or private companies within or outside of Canada.

Is an individual allowed to serve as a PI on one project and simultaneously as a co-PI on other projects within the same funding cycle?

No, applicants can only be listed as a PI or co-PI on one project per funding cycle.

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Collaboration & Engagement

Is prior collaboration among team members required?

No. Prior collaboration among team members is not required. However, evidence of past or ongoing collaboration may strengthen an application by demonstrating the team's ability to work effectively together. Applicants without prior collaborations should clearly describe how team members' complementary expertise will be integrated to successfully carry out the proposed research.

Is there a preference for proposals with a diverse range of collaborators or interdisciplinary teams?

Proposals will be neither advantaged nor disadvantaged by including collaborators from diverse disciplines or sectors. Research teams need the appropriate expertise to successfully complete the proposed project, whether that expertise comes from one or more disciplines.

Is participation in all meetings and workshops required?

Yes. Active participation in meetings and collaborative workshops is an expectation of the Explore Research Program, as these sessions are integral to cross-disciplinary engagement, knowledge integration, and the development of initiative-level insights. For more information, see the Collaborative Engagement and Knowledge Integration section in the Application Guide.

How will the confidentiality of my team's work be ensured when engaging with other research teams?

Confidentiality is a core component of the Explore Research Program. All funded research teams are bound by contractual terms that require them to respect the confidentiality of other teams' research activities and findings. Information shared during progress meetings and collaboration or knowledge mobilization sessions remains confidential among participating parties unless otherwise agreed. CSA Group also works with project teams to ensure that initiative-level outputs, such as Research Insight Reports, do not disclose confidential or proprietary information.

Where will the in-person meetings be held?

Each initiative will convene one in-person meeting over the initiative life cycle. In-person meetings may be held at a CSA Group office in Canada, for example, in Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, or Calgary. Project budgets should account for the PI or a designate to travel to this meeting.

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My project includes an industrial partner. Would proprietary information need to be made publicly available?

No. CSA Group recognizes that some research projects, particularly those involving industry partners, may generate data or findings that require protection. A reasonable level of confidentiality is respected. However, since the Explore Research program is designed to support knowledge sharing and the development of initiative-level Research Insight Reports, projects must be able to contribute non-proprietary insights to the broader research initiative. Projects for which all findings are expected to remain fully proprietary, with no capacity for shared learnings or synthesis, are not a good fit for the Explore program.

Timeline

Our project is behind schedule. Is it possible to get a no-cost extension?

Requests for no-cost extensions may be considered on a case-by-case basis. Project teams are strongly encouraged to proactively communicate delays or emerging risks with their CSA Group Explore Research Manager as early as possible. Early communication helps CSA Group assess potential impacts across the research initiative and work with teams to manage timelines where feasible.

I plan to leverage project funds to apply for other funding, but the decision may take several months. Can I delay starting the project until then?

Project teams can use funding from other sources; however, project activities and timelines cannot be dependent on other external funding and are expected to proceed as planned while awaiting other funding decisions. Delays to project timelines would negatively impact project teams across the entire research initiative. Some grace in the start date of the funding may be negotiated but will be determined entirely by CSA Group. Project teams are encouraged to apply quickly for any additional funding, and must begin the project using CSA funds while awaiting other decisions.

Will this program offer future Calls for Proposals?

Yes. Future calls may build on existing research initiatives and/or introduce new research initiatives. Applicants are encouraged to visit the CSA Explore Research Program website for information on current opportunities as they become available.

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Reporting

What are the reporting requirements for this funding?

A brief project update report is required every six months. The final project report is due three months after the conclusion of the project. Report requirements will be communicated to all successful applicants. These reports will not be circulated publicly. These are distinct from the Research Insight Reports, which are written by the CSA Explore Research Program team.

What milestones or outputs are expected from funded projects?

The primary expectation for all supported projects is active participation in all CSA Group-led meetings and workshops. This includes engaging in quarterly progress meetings with CSA Group and periodic collaboration workshops with CSA Group and other project teams within the research initiative to share insights and findings from their ongoing projects.

Beyond this participation, research outputs are entirely self-directed. These outputs may include, but are not limited to, academic or non-academic publications, presentations, research reports, or other outputs appropriate to the project team, research field, and audience. Teams should share any publication submissions to journals, conferences, etc. with CSA Group, along with updates on their publication status.

How will results be shared with the broader community?

At the initiative level, CSA Group will synthesize findings across projects into Research Insight Reports to provide high-level summaries of the initiatives' collective findings. Research Insight Reports will be written by the CSA Explore Research team in consultation with project teams.

Questions

Where can I ask further questions?

Any additional questions can be directed to explore.research@csagroup.org.

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