

TDRA Seed Funding Competition 2024

Request for Applications

Background

The Toronto Dementia Research Alliance (TDRA) is pleased to announce a seed fund competition for 2024. These awards – valued at up to \$70,000 – will be granted to collaborative projects that advance scientific knowledge in the field of dementia. There will be up to three seed funds available for projects that focus on neurodegenerative disease/dementia in general.

Timeline for 2024 Competition

Letter of interest (LOI) deadline	June 14, 2024
Invitation to submit a full application	June 28, 2024
Deadline for full application	September 6, 2024
Notification of award	Week of November 18, 2024
Release of funds	Starting January 1, 2025
Research Progress Report	90 days after receipt of funds, then annually

Objective and Scope

- The project proposal need to focus on neurodegenerative disease/dementia
- These seed funds provide support for investigators during the critical period between the initiation of research and the receipt of sustained funding
- The funding will be for collaborative projects that bring together investigators across TDRA sites
- The more novel and innovative the project, the more competitive the application

Eligibility

Proposals will be deemed eligible based on the following:

- Principal Investigators must have a scientific appointment at one of the TDRA partner sites: University of Toronto, Baycrest, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, Unity Health Toronto, or the University Health Network
- **Collaborative Projects:** Two Principal Investigators (PIs) are required for projects to be considered collaborative; the PIs must be from two different TDRA sites, OR have a combination of pre-clinical and clinical research focus
- Previous award winners of the Temerty-Tanz-TDRA Seed Fund are not eligible to reapply as principal applicants
- Women and members of under-represented groups are strongly encouraged to apply
- Projects that focus on issues in traditionally underrepresented groups, such as Black, First Nations, Inuit, or Métis communities are strongly encouraged to be submitted
- Successful applicants must agree to:
 - Provide progress reports to TDRA (three months, then yearly), and present at an annual research day
 - Make any new data collected as a part of this application available to other researchers after an agreed-upon period of time

Letter of Interest

Applicants are required to provide a Letter of Interest (LOI) using the LOI Application Form that includes the following:

- Title of research proposal
- Amount of funding requested
- Name and email address of principal applicant
- Names of co-applicants and collaborators for the proposed research
- Description of the proposed project in plain language (maximum 300 words)

The LOI must be in minimum 11-point font with 1-inch margins.

LOIs will be invited to submit a full application after they pass an eligibility and scope review.

The LOI must be emailed to tdra@utoronto.ca by 5 pm on June 14, 2024. You will be sent an email confirmation of receipt. If you do not receive this email within three business days, please follow up with tdra@utoronto.ca.

Applicants will be notified by email as to whether or not they are invited to proceed with the submission of a full application.

Guidelines for Invited Full Application Submission

- The research proposal should be novel and previously unfunded, or form a part of or addition to a funded study that is not currently not funded.
- The completed application must be received no later than 5pm on September 6, 2024. The magnitude of the project should match the size of the award. It is anticipated that this funding will be used to produce data to support the application of future larger grants.
- Documents received after the submission deadline will not be accepted. The applicant is responsible for ensuring completeness of the application. Incomplete applications or applications that exceed the page limits will not be considered.
- The following are necessary for preparation of the research proposal:
 - 1) Cover page with: title of research proposal; amount of funding requested; names, degrees, and roles of the principal applicant and co-applicants; contact information of the principal applicant
 - 2) Summary of the proposed research in plain language (separate page, 300-word limit)
 - 3) Statement of Objectives; Specific Aims and Hypotheses (separate page, one-page limit)
 - 4) Research Strategy (start on new page, two-page limit). The headings suggested include:
 - Brief review of Literature and Background Information
 - Preliminary Data (if available, but not required)
 - Design and Methodology
 - Power Analysis and Data Analytic Plan
 - Anticipated Timeline
 - Innovation, Impact, Future Research Plans
 - 5) References (separate page, one-page limit)
 - 6) Budget: with justification for each year of funding (separate page, one-page limit)
 - 7) Curriculum Vitae: NIH-style biosketch for the Principal Investigators
- The application should be prepared using 11-point or larger typeface and one-inch margins.
- Appendices and Supplements are not permitted. Any tables, figures, or diagrams should be included in the two-page Research Strategy.

Submission of the Application

The full seed fund application and the CVs of the Principal Investigators should be sent together by email to tdra@utoronto.ca by 5 pm on September 6, 2024. Applications that are late, incomplete, or exceed the page limit will not be considered. Each should be a separate .pdf document, attached to the same email. You will be sent an email confirmation of receipt.

Conditions of the Fund

Research Ethics Board Approval

- The successful applicant must provide evidence of Research Ethics Board approval along with consent forms where human subjects are involved in the study, *before* the funds are released.
- The successful applicant must provide evidence of University Animal Care Committee approval where animals are involved in the study, *before* the funds are released.
- It is expected that the successful applicant will obtain REB or ACC approval (when applicable) within three months of the date of notification of the award.

Financial Considerations

- The amount of each seed fund is intended to cover costs associated with the study, including equipment (e.g. study drug/device costs), research personnel salary, technical support, and other miscellaneous costs (e.g., publications, presentations, and software licensing fees). The seed fund is not intended to provide salary support for the investigators. No indirect costs are provided.
- The funds must be fully spent within three years of being awarded.

Research and Seed Fund Administration

- The seed fund recipients must provide a three-month progress report, annual progress reports, and a final report to TDRA summarizing work completed, including any publications, as well as an accounting for funds.

Publications

- Seed fund recipients are expected to present their methods and findings at the Temerty-Tanz-TDRA Annual Workshop and at least one peer-reviewed scientific meeting, and to submit their work for publication in peer-reviewed journals.
- All publications and presentations that result from a project supported by this Seed Fund should carry the following acknowledgment: **“This research was supported by the Toronto Dementia Research Alliance (TDRA) Seed Fund.”**

Data Sharing Agreement

- Seed fund recipients must agree that any data that are collected from a project supported by these seed funds should be available to be shared via TDRA’s Open Science Principles.

Seed Fund Recipient Responsibilities

The following responsibilities must be assumed and carried out by the seed fund recipient:

- Review and execution of University of Toronto study grant agreement and any applicable local grant agreements.
- Research Ethics Board submission and approval (if applicable). REB approval must be obtained prior to transfer of funds.
- Health Canada Clinical Trial Application (CTA) submission and approval (if applicable).
- Compliance with all applicable laws, regulations, or guidelines (e.g. ICH-GCP, etc.).
- Study-related activities such as data management, statistical analysis, medical writing, monitoring, etc.

- Registration and posting of study results on <http://prsinfo.clinicaltrials.gov> (if applicable).
- Safety reporting to Health Canada, the Research Ethics Board (as per local requirements), and if a drug/device product is involved, the Product Safety/Pharmacovigilance group for the appropriate company.
- Communication of progress updates to TDRA.
- Forward copy of abstract(s)/manuscript(s) to TDRA upon submission to meetings/journal.

Review Process and Criteria

The seed fund has a two-stage review, with the first level of review carried out by external reviewers with relevant expertise matching the LOIs. The second level of review is performed at the peer-review meeting composed of the external reviewers, the TDRA executive director, and the scientific review officer.

Initial review by external reviewers

Initial peer review is completed by external reviewers with relevant expertise matching the LOIs. The reviewers are vetted for potential conflicts of interest and appropriate expertise requirements. Each research proposal will be scored by two external reviewers, who will assign scores based on the following criteria:

Significance & Impact

- Importance, innovation, scientific merit.
- Contribution to advancement of scientific knowledge in the area of depression and dementia, or to dementia as a whole.
- Novelty of collaboration.
- Innovation that leads to transformative, paradigm-shifting advances in the field.

Investigators

- Do the investigators have appropriate experience and training?
- Do the investigators have complementary and integrated expertise?

Feasibility

- Hypotheses clearly stated and methods proposed are reasonable to determine outcomes.
- Feasibility of study design, methodology, analysis.
- Potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success presented.
- Adequate power and sample size.
- Study budget and proposed timelines.
- Relevant training and experience of principal applicant and other investigators.

Second level review at peer-review meeting

The projects that receive top scores, indicating high merit and potential for funding, will advance to the second level of review. Typically, this stage includes the top half of all applications. The peer-review meeting will be attended by the chair, external reviewers, and the scientific review officer. During the meeting, the assigned reviewers will present an overview of the proposal, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses, while the other members actively listen to the discussion and assess the application based on their own expertise. Feedback in the form of a summary highlighting areas for improvement can be provided to PIs. Ultimately, the project(s) with the highest ranking among all reviewers will be chosen for funding.

Notification of Decision for Seed Fund

Seed fund recipients will be notified of the decision regarding funding the week of November 18, 2024. Both successful and unsuccessful applicants will receive a notification.