Future Skills Centre – Centre des Compétences futures

Guidelines and Application Instructions for August 2019 Call for Proposals

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Introduction

Canada's competitiveness and prosperity relies on a skilled and competent workforce. There is mounting evidence, however, that in a time of rapid economic and labour market change, we need to act collectively to ensure our skills development ecosystem keeps pace with the scale of disruption we are facing. There is an urgent need to better understand what skills Canadians require to prosper and how Canada can leverage its skills development infrastructure to meet the needs of workers and employers across the country today and into the future.

The Future Skills Centre – Centre des Compétences futures is a forward-thinking research centre dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. As a pan-Canadian initiative, we are collaborating across sectors and industries to identify, prototype, test, and rigorously measure innovative approaches to skills assessment and development.

Our approach begins with a collaborative and systematic process of identifying solutions with the most promise to move the dial on pressing challenges, and then supporting sustained, high-quality implementation with project partners as we work together to learn what works for whom and under what conditions. Our growing portfolio of projects is testing models and approaches across the country to generate and share evidence about how to ensure Canadians are prepared to succeed in the new economy.

The Centre has a particular focus on those who are not currently participating fully in Canada's prosperity — the under- and unemployed, women, youth, Indigenous people, newcomers, racialized people, persons with disabilities, veterans, people from rural, remote and northern communities, and people living in official language minority communities.

Call Overview and Objectives

The Future Skills Centre is currently seeking proposals for innovative projects that develop and test new or emerging approaches in following areas:

1. Supporting workers to manage labour market transitions;
2. Engaging employers in developing and delivering solutions to skills gap challenges; and,
3. Optimizing skills development systems by building the capacity of service providers to better collaborate with each other and other organizations that could expand or improve their services.

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Application Process and Timelines

The application process will take place in three steps:

1. **Letters of Interest must be submitted on the application portal by 5pm EDT on September 16, 2019**. Decisions will be communicated by the end of October.
2. Shortlisted applicants will then be invited to submit a full application by December 16, 2019.
3. Interviews with shortlisted projects will take place in February 2020. Final decisions will be communicated by the end of February.

Successful projects will be announced in March 2020.

Projects must launch by June 30, 2020, and must be completed and funds spent by June 30, 2022.

1.
Letters of Interest must be submitted

By September 16, 2019
5pm EDT

2.
Shortlist of applicants will be invited to submit a full application

By December 16, 2019
5pm EDT

3.
Interviews with shortlisted projects

Final decision by February 2020

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Objective

The objective of this Call for Proposals is to identify, test and evaluate innovative projects that have the potential to generate actionable evidence about how to better equip Canadians with the skills required to navigate a fast-changing labour market. The Future Skills Centre is seeking proposals that address one of these three questions:

1. ***How can we best support Canadians facing labour market disruption to transition to new jobs or industries?***

A number of factors, including technological advances, shifting business models, and environmental changes are changing the workplace at an unprecedented pace. To support Canadians in confidently navigating this new reality, timely and accessible opportunities for upskilling and reskilling are required throughout working lives. This includes strategies to help young people, newcomers and other groups facing barriers to enter the workforce and those seeking to re-enter the labour market after an absence, or transition from a one career to another. Potential areas of focus could include:

- Testing new models that improve access, streamline pathways and accelerate the reskilling and upskilling process for Canadian workers;
- Gaining a better understanding of how strategies that strengthen social and emotional resilience can enable more effective career transitions;
- Improving sector-specific career transition supports to enable faster (re) employment for workers who are displaced;
- Developing new learning frameworks (methodologies/curriculum) focused on disruptive technologies to better equip workers for transitions; and,
- Supporting labour market entry and sustainable employment for youth, newcomers and individuals facing barriers.

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2. How can employers be more effectively engaged in developing and delivering demand-driven solutions to skills gap challenges?

Canadian employers across all sectors of our economy are grappling with how to keep pace with disruptive changes and attract, manage, train and retain workers with the right skill sets and competencies. Addressing these challenges is critical to domestic and global competitiveness and, ultimately, to Canada's economic growth. Actively engaging employers in the co-creation of workforce development and training systems solutions is key to ensuring a more inclusive, demand-driven approach to skills building, hiring practices and partnerships that support onboarding and ongoing training of employees. Potential areas of focus could include:

- Creating demand-driven sectoral pathways that provide pathways to employment, including in-demand skills training and relevant wrap-around supports for workers facing barriers;
- Developing work-integrated learning opportunities to support upskilling and reskilling;
- Supporting employers to keep pace with disruptive changes, and to attract, manage, train and retain workers with future proof skill sets including technology literate employees;
- Aligning training and skills development approaches with emerging employer demands and sector-specific strategies to address transitions; and,
- Advancing employer policies, processes and tools to create more inclusive workplaces for Canadians who are not currently participating fully in the workforce.

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3. *How can skills development systems be optimized, building up the capacity of service providers and encouraging collaboration between organizations?*

Canada's skills ecosystem is fragmented, challenging our ability to ensure coherent and coordinated approaches for Canadians to access quality training and skills development opportunities and supports. Given the number of disrupting factors challenging the status quo (e.g., aging workforce, accelerating technology advancements, new business models), a stronger ecosystem is essential to ensuring that all Canadians have access to the right opportunities at the right time to develop their skills and that employers have access to the talent pools they need to grow and prosper. Potential areas of focus could include:

- Supporting technological advancements and emerging practices that enable more collaborative and integrated models of service delivery to improve access to and quality of skills development and training;
- Understanding the role of capacity building and technical supports in optimizing workforce development systems by helping employers, practitioners and institutions better coordinate, integrate and measure efforts;
- Developing multi-stakeholder (business, education, community, Indigenous organizations, labour, not-for-profit organizations, governments) networks, hubs, and incubators to steer and accelerate progress collectively;
- Supporting new approaches such as micro-credentials, fast-track education, online and blended learning, alternative pathways and other innovative approaches that provide accessible and flexible opportunities to develop marketable skills; and,
- Understanding how expanded access to more quality, timely and accessible sector-specific labour market forecasts can position employers to better support on-the-job skills development.

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Innovation and Evidence Streams

The Future Skills Centre supports projects across the innovation-to-evidence continuum. Our approach to implementation support and evidence generation aims to provide a clear path towards growth and development for each project, whether it involves developing an innovative new model or rigorously testing the impact of an established model to provide evidence needed to make a scaling decision and inform policy.

As part of the adjudication process for this Call for Proposals, the adjudication panel will assess Letters of Interest to determine whether they best fit in our innovation stream or evidence stream:

- The *Innovation Stream* will support successful projects in any of the three themes that are in an early development phase. Projects in this stream will have access to technical advice and other implementation guidance to support the development of robust theories of change and exploration of the extent project activities produce target outcomes and identification of factors that contribute to success.
- The *Evidence Stream* will support approaches in any of the three themes that have existing evidence of their effectiveness and have potential to be a scalable solution to our Canada's most pressing skills development challenges.

The two streams will help the Future Skills Centre ensure a balanced portfolio of projects across the innovation-to-evidence continuum. We will work closely with successful project partners in both streams to design a customized evaluation approach that align with each project's purpose, context, and goals.

This Call for Proposals is designed to fund new activities and the expansion of existing activities to new clients and geographies. Existing, ongoing service delivery activities are not eligible for this Call.

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Funding Amounts and Project Duration

Projects of all different sizes and stages of development will be considered.

The total budget for this call is $36 million. The maximum award for an individual project under the Innovation Stream is $1.5 million, but we aim for most projects to be funded within the range of $500,000 to $1 million. The maximum award under the Evidence Stream is $2.5 million, but we aim for most projects to be funded within the range of $1 million to $2 million. The maximum duration of projects is 24 months.

Letters of Interest must include an approximate project budget and your requested funding. Funding requests should be commensurate with the level of effort required to successfully deliver on project outcomes. While direct matching funds are not required, a demonstration of in-kind support on a 1:1 basis is strongly encouraged.

If shortlisted, proponents will be required to submit a detailed budget as part of the full application.

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Selection Criteria

Letters of Interest will be reviewed by a selection committee according to the following criteria (scored out of 100 points):
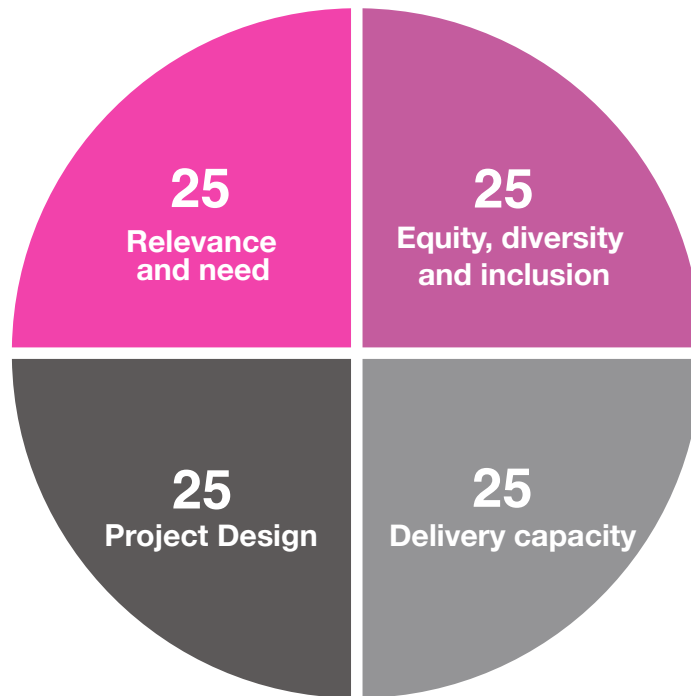
1. **Relevance and need (25 points)** – Projects must address a pressing and well-specified need related to one of the three themes outlined in this Call for Proposals. Key questions include:
   - To what extent does the project address a well-specified need related to one of the three themes?
   - Does the project target relevant outcomes for participants and stakeholders as specified in the Future Skills Centre's common outcomes framework?
   - Does the project specify a clear and relevant target population?
   - Is the project applicable beyond the context in which it will be implemented?
   - Does the project have the potential to be replicated and expanded? (E.g., the project's potential to work with other population groups, locations, or in other sectors.)

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2. **Equity, diversity and inclusion (25 points)** – Projects should align with the Future Skills Centre's goals to create opportunities for under-represented, marginalized and vulnerable groups and incorporate diverse knowledge, worldviews, and experiences. Key questions include:

   - To what extent does the project address the needs of under-represented groups?
   - To what extent are the needs of under-represented groups defined and incorporated into the project goals?
   - How has the project partnered with relevant and credible organizations representing these groups?
   - How are diversity and inclusion strategies, policies and practices reflected in the organizations leading the project, including in governance and decision-making structures?
   - What previous experience does the organization have in serving diverse populations?

3. **Project Design (25 points)** – Projects must provide a clear description of the model design they are proposing to test, including a list of contextual factors that could influence success. Key questions include:

   - Does the project have a clear model? (E.g., does the proposal put forward a purposeful and clearly defined approach or set of activities that address a specific need?)
   - Does the project exhibit an understanding of the context and contextual factors that could impact success? (E.g. local economic contexts, key stakeholders, issues or barriers faced by specific target groups.)
   - Does the project have any components that are new? New projects could include:

     - testing promising approaches from outside of Canada;
     - using new tools or approaches that have not been widely applied in skills development and employment;
     - using new platforms or approaches for reaching target populations;
     - piloting an established approach with a new target population; and,
     - Replicating and expanding a small-scale approach to rigorously assess its impact.

4. **Delivery capacity (25 points)** – Applicants must demonstrate the capacity to deliver the project they propose. Key questions include:
   - Does the project have a clearly defined plan for delivery? (E.g. who is going to carry out the project activities, when, where, and with whom?)
   - Does the applicant (with partners) have the expertise and experience needed to deliver on the project?
   - Does the applicant have a system for collecting data in order to track progress? (E.g. what system is being used, what data is collected, and when?)
   - Does the applicant / partnership have the thematic or population specific expertise to deliver the project? (E.g., expertise in working with people intended to be served by the project, in-depth knowledge of the sector, etc.)
   - Does the applicant provide evidence that the project is technically, operationally and economically feasible?
   - Does the applicant have a track record of producing results and of managing projects on this scale, on time and on budget?

5. **Evidence (0 points)** – Applicants must provide information that enables the Centre to determine whether they fall into the Innovation Stream or Evidence Stream. This information will not be scored and is used only to situate projects along the innovation-to-evidence continuum. Key questions include:
   - How much experience does the applicant have in delivering this project?
   - How much experience does the applicant have delivering a similar project?
   - Does the project have a well-articulated and feasible logic model and theory of change? (E.g., are the inputs, activities, outputs, and intended outcomes of the project clearly stated? Is there a clear and compelling link from proposed inputs and activities to intended outcomes?) For a suggested logic model template, click here.
   - Are the activities proposed in the project aligned with the outcomes targeted, and are they in high enough doses?
   - Has the project been evaluated before? What did the evaluation results find?
   - Can the model demonstrate linkages between program activities, near to inter-mediate term outcomes, and final core outcomes?
   - Is there evidence from evaluations of similar projects?

The selection committee's decisions will be informed by the Centre's mandate that a minimum of 50% of its total funding will be invested in projects, which address the needs of underrepresented and disadvantaged groups, including up to 20% to address the needs of youth (defined as those aged 15-30 years old).

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Application Instructions

Letters of Interest will be considered complete when they include the following:

    A. General Information questions – Excel spreadsheet provided on the application portal

    B. Project Summary – PDF attachment (maximum 5 pages)
All required documents must be provided at the time of submission. Please note that incomplete or late applications will not be considered.

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

Lead organization (legal name):
Project partners (if applicable):
Primary contact information (name, title):
Mailing address:
Telephone:
Email:
Website:
<u>Organization Eligibility:</u>
Title of proposal:
Project Theme:
Target population(s):
Number of potential participants:
Province(s) and/or territory/ies where your proposed project would take place:
Target sector(s) (current and/or proposed):
Does the project have any components that are innovative or new?:
Has the project been evaluated before?:
Is there evidence from evaluations of similar projects?:
Estimated project budget ($):
Estimated project budget per participant:
Estimated amount requested ($):
Proposed start date:
Proposed end date:

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B. PROJECT SUMMARY

In no more than five pages, please provide the following:
- Brief description of your organization.
- Names and roles of key partners who you might work with.
- Problem Statement: Describe the challenge, need and/or demand being addressed.
- Solutions: Outline the model and activities being proposed that have the potential to solve the need and/or demand.
- Relevance and need: Explain why this is important, and what evidence substantiates the need, relevance or urgency of the issue(s) and proposed solution(s).
- Equity, diversity and inclusion: Outline how the project creates opportunities for under-represented, marginalized and vulnerable groups, and to what extent diversity, equity and inclusion is a core component of the work and is effectively integrated throughout the design–for team, organizations, practice(s), project and scale.
- Project Design: Provide a clear description of the model that would be tested, including a list of contextual factors that could influence success.
- Delivery capacity: Explain how your organization / network of organizations has the capacity to deliver the proposed project.
- Evidence: Provide information about innovation, experience and evidence, allowing the Centre to situate the project along the innovation-to-evidence continuum, in order to determine whether the project falls into the Innovation Stream or Evidence Stream.

Project Summaries are expected to follow instructions according to the following criteria:
- Use 8 1/2" x 11" (22x 28 cm) paper with margins of at least 3/4" (2 cm) all around.
- Use 12-point font or larger. If measured in characters per inch (cpi), it must be no more than 10 cpi. Condensed type is unacceptable.
- Text must be single-spaced with a maximum of six lines per inch.
- Diagrams, tables and images may be included in addition to the allowable page limit.

Questions about the application process and timelines may be submitted to
projects@fsc-ccf.ca and responses will be posted to the FAQ section of the website.
The deadline for submitting questions is 5PM EDT on September 6.
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Organization Eligibility

Applications may be submitted by a sole organization, or a consortium of organizations, including:

1. Legally incorporated not-for-profit organizations, including not-for-profit social enterprises and registered charities
2. Publicly-funded post-secondary institutions
3. Industry associations
4. Professional associations
5. An Indigenous organization that is a legal entity
6. Municipalities or District Social Services Administration Boards
7. For profit organizations (provided the project is undertaken at cost, with no mark-ups or profit incorporated)

The following types of organizations are not eligible to apply:

1. Provinces or territories; and
2. Federal government bodies.
3. Individual persons

Applications with multiple partners are eligible to apply. However, one organization must be identified as the lead applicant for the purpose of signing the funding agreement, receiving and managing the funds, ensuring coordination of project parties and activities, and communicating with the Centre regarding the status of the project on behalf of all partners. The lead organization must be a Canadian entity. All participating organizations must be eligible as set out above.

Applicants are only eligible to lead on one application, but may participate in more than one application.

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Evaluation and Knowledge Mobilization

The Future Skills Centre is committed to generating evidence about what works in skills development. As part of this commitment, the Centre is requiring all funded projects to participate in evaluation activities funded by the FSC.

Evaluation tools and approaches will be co-designed with project proponents to ensure relevance, appropriateness, and usability. In addition, evaluations will be designed with a focus on building the proponent's capacity to use evaluation and evaluative thinking to improve their performance. The Centre's evaluation team will reach out to successful proponents within the first 60 days following the announcement of the funding decision to begin co-designing an evaluation approach.

A gender-plus diversity lens will be embedded in the evaluation approach, respecting the "nothing about us without us" approach that ensures evaluations are informed by and aligned with the needs of diverse groups who are impacted by innovation projects.

The Future Skills Centre is also committed to sharing the results of the projects with a wide audience to enhance the use of evidence in the skills development ecosystem. The Centre will work with successful proponents to implement effective knowledge translation and dissemination activities to share important findings and lessons learned.

As a requirement of the funding, recipients must agree to make widely publicly available all Research Information (reports, evaluations and end products) created, generated or otherwise arising from all project activities funded by the Future Skills Centre using as many channels as is required to fully support and facilitate the goals and objectives of the Centre. Recipients must make reasonable efforts to commercialize or otherwise make available to Canadians any intellectual property arising from activities funded by the FSC.

In addition to working with the Future Skills Centre to support evaluation and knowledge mobilization activities, project proponents will also be required to participate in collaborative events and activities to support shared learning, knowledge mobilization, and build a community of practice among projects supported by the Centre.

By applying, you are agreeing that you are committed to participating in evaluation and knowledge mobilization activities.

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Tri-Council Policy Statement

The Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2) is a Canadian Government policy statement that sets ethics standards for conducting research on human subjects. All funded projects must comply with the guidelines set out in the TCPS 2, and must be approved by a qualified research ethics board if required by those guidelines. Organizations that do not otherwise have an internal research ethics board may utilize the services of the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board to obtain approval. All such approvals must be obtained prior to the commencement of the project.

Due Diligence

The Future Skills Centre reserves the right to conduct thorough due diligence on shortlisted projects invited to submit a full application.

Due diligence will include a review of the lead organization's financial health and funding sources, the project's management team, operational plans and existing resources. The Centre will also conduct reference checks and will reach out to provincial-territorial governments in those jurisdictions where activities would be undertaken to provide them with advance notice of the shortlisted projects to ensure they address local needs and complement existing initiatives.

It is the responsibility of any potential recipient of FSC funds in Quebec to determine if the Ministère du Conseil Exécutif (M-30) applies to them. Any entity that is subject to the Act is responsible for obtaining the necessary authorization prior to the conclusion of the agreement. The Centre will abide by the determination of the recipient whether they require an M-30, and will allow a reasonable amount of time for the Quebec proponent to obtain the authorization from the Government of Québec, should it be required.

The Centre will work with successful proponents to establish project agreements. As the host organization for the Future Skills Centre, all project agreements will be made with Ryerson University.

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Confidentiality

Hosted by Ryerson University, the Future Skills Centre is subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA). The Act provides every person with a right of access to information in the custody or under the control of the Ryerson University, subject to a limited set of exemptions. Section 17 of the Act provides a limited exemption for third party information that reveals a trade secret or scientific, commercial, technical, financial or labour relations information supplied in confidence where disclosure of the information could reasonably be expected to result in certain harms.

Any trade secret or any scientific, technical, commercial, financial or labour relations information submitted to the Future Skills Centre in confidence should be clearly marked as such. The Centre will provide notice before allowing access to a record that might contain information referred to in Section 17 so that the affected party may make representations to the Centre concerning disclosure in accordance with FIPPA.

The Future Skills Centre – Centre des Compétences futures is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

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