



Alliance Advantage grants

Merit evaluation and funding decisions

This guide provides more information about how NSERC selects grants for funding for Alliance Advantage and the following jointly funded Alliance opportunities:

- NSERC Alliance – Mitacs Accelerate
- Alliance grants and Ontario Centre of Innovation Collaborate 2 Commercialize
- NSERC Alliance and Alberta Innovates Campus Alberta Small Business Engagement Stream II.

Merit evaluation and competitive selection process

How are merit ratings determined?

If your Alliance application passes an initial administrative assessment, NSERC will then evaluate its merit using the mechanisms described on the [Alliance Advantage - Review](#) webpage.

If the merit assessment mechanism requires an external review, your application is sent to reviewers who have expertise directly related to your proposal. These reviewers provide comments on how well your proposal meets the program's [evaluation criteria](#), following NSERC's Alliance [instructions for external reviewers](#).

For all merit assessment mechanisms, NSERC file managers assign a rating (Does Not Satisfy, Meets, Exceeds, Exceptional) to each merit evaluation sub-criterion based on established [merit indicators](#). If your proposal was reviewed by external reviewers, their comments are considered by NSERC file managers when assigning the merit ratings. These ratings are then converted to numeric values and averaged to calculate your application's overall merit score.

Your application will be considered for funding if it receives at least a "Meets" rating on every merit evaluation sub-criterion and NSERC confirms that, when required, any identified risks for Canada's national security can be appropriately mitigated. If your proposal does not pass the initial administrative assessment or does not receive at least a Meets on all sub-criteria, it will be removed from further consideration.

How are applications selected for funding?

To provide applicants with timely funding decisions, NSERC Alliance holds competition rounds every two weeks, with the program's annual budget divided equally across 26 rounds.

During each competition round, all applications being considered for funding are ranked by their overall merit score. NSERC then selects applications for funding starting from the top of this ranked list, until the budget available for that round runs out.

If your application is not selected in its first competition round, it will automatically be considered in the next two competition rounds. This gives your application up to three chances to be funded.

When will I learn if my application is funded?

See the [Alliance Review](#) webpage for expected assessment times.

Following your application's first competition round, you will receive a letter informing you that your application was selected for funding or that it was not initially selected for funding but will be considered in two more competition rounds. At the same time, NSERC will share the results of your application's merit evaluation (i.e., assigned merit ratings) and reviewer comments (if applicable).

If your application is not selected for funding in the first competition round, you will receive a final funding decision within approximately four weeks. Please wait until then before contacting us for a status update.

How does NSERC ensure consistency in the merit review?

NSERC file managers receive extensive training on the Alliance merit indicators and participate in regular calibration exercises. To further assure calibration and consistency, every merit rating is assigned based on input from a minimum of two file managers and verification by a member of senior management or through a staff committee.

Success rates and competition results

What is the current success rate for Alliance?

NSERC's [Alliance Grants Dashboard](#) is updated every month with key program statistics, including success rates. You can use filters (e.g., 'Type of Call') to find the data you are interested in.

Since the funding opportunities covered in this document accept applications year-round with no limits on the number of applications submitted, demand for funding can change over time. As a result, success rates will fluctuate.

Why have Alliance success rates declined?

The NSERC Alliance program was designed to be competitive, aiming to fund the most impactful partnerships that generate new knowledge and create benefits for Canada. Since 2023, both the number of applications and the average funding requested per application have been increasing. This increased demand was influenced by many factors, including [NSERC's 2023 efforts](#) to reduce barriers to participation in the Alliance grants program, driven by feedback from the research community.

What merit score would give me a good chance of being funded?

You should always aim to submit the strongest application possible. Because the pool of applications under consideration within each competition round is continually shifting, it is not possible to predict whether a specific score will guarantee funding. To buffer against potential fluctuations, your application is considered in up to three consecutive competition rounds.

Do applications reviewed using different assessment mechanisms compete against each other?

No. During the competition rounds, NSERC groups applications according to [merit assessment mechanism](#) (i.e., those sent for external review and those not). NSERC aims to maintain similar success rates between the two mechanisms. Funding for each of the bi-weekly competition rounds is divided between these two groups according to the proportion of funds requested by applications within each group. For example, if externally reviewed requests make up 70% of the total funds requested in a competition round, NSERC will aim to allocate 70% of the available funds for that round to externally reviewed applications.

Revisions and resubmissions

Can I revise my application before a final funding decision is made?

No. To ensure a fair competitive selection process, NSERC cannot accept revisions to your application or responses to reviewers' comments.

Can I appeal a merit rating or funding decision?

To understand your merit ratings, you should first review the [merit indicators](#) and, where applicable, the [instructions for external reviewers](#) along with the external reviewers' comments.

If you still have a concern about your merit ratings or funding decision, please contact the file manager named in your decision letter.

An appeal of an NSERC funding decision must be based on a compelling demonstration of a procedural error in the review of the application. An appeal process does not entail a re-assessment of an application. Please refer to the [Appeals of NSERC funding decisions page](#) for further information.

Are there restrictions on resubmitting an unsuccessful application?

If your application is not awarded, you may resubmit a revised version. Resubmissions must include a cover letter explaining the changes you have made. NSERC staff will review this to ensure that changes were made, and any issues raised in the previous assessment have been addressed.

You can contact the file manager named in your decision letter to better understand the merit assessment of your previous application, but please note that, in fairness to all applicants, our staff cannot provide personalized advice on how to improve your application.

In most cases, your decision letter will indicate an option for your recent application to be reactivated in the NSERC On-line System. This will allow you to edit your previous submission instead of starting over.

When resubmitting your application, please include suggestions for new external reviewers as applicable. Resubmissions undergo a full new review and may be evaluated by different reviewers.

Funding considerations

Does NSERC reduce Alliance grant award amounts to fund more applications?

No, we do not reduce award amounts to fund more projects. The suitability of your budget is assessed as part of the merit evaluation. If your proposal is awarded, the amount of funding you receive from NSERC will be based on the eligible expenses in your proposed budget and your partners' contributions. This approach ensures that funded projects have the resources they need to be successful.

What can I do to help NSERC manage grant funds effectively?

To ensure public funds are used responsibly, your proposed budget must be economical, effective and well justified. If you anticipate or experience spending delays or a reduced need for funds, please note this in your progress report or notify the NSERC file manager named in your decision letter.