

# Fonds de recherche du Québec – Santé (FRQS)

## Funding Workshop

Monday August 23<sup>rd</sup> 2021

*Application deadline: October 5<sup>th</sup> 2021*

**By Ariane Lismer, CIHR CGS-D fellow**

**PhD Candidate in Dr. Sarah Kimmins lab, Pharmacology and Therapeutics,  
McGill University**

# Covered topics

- Types of doctoral awards
- Why you should apply to doctoral awards
- Eligibility requirements for the FRQS Doctoral Training Award
- Selection criteria for the FRQS Doctoral Training Award
- Application content for the FRQS Doctoral Training Award – tips based on personal experience
- Other comments and final advice

# Types of doctoral awards

<https://www.mcgill.ca/gps/funding/opportunities/phd>

- Internal funding awards (usually one year)
  - Faculty Awards
  - Departmental Awards
- External funding awards for Health Science streams
  - Tri-Agency Doctoral Program Awards: CIHR
    - 30,000\$ stipend for up to three years
    - 5,000\$ yearly research allowance for three years (rolls-over)
  - FRQ-S Doctoral Training Award
    - 21,000\$ stipend for up to four years

# Why apply to a doctoral award?

- Clearly **identify your thesis aims** and get a concrete idea of the direction you want your project to take
- **Raise your own funds**: your supervisor won't have to pay you through their grants so more \$\$\$ for research
- **Independence** of research (e.g. 5,000\$ yearly research allowance for the CIHR CGS-D)
- Good **training** for grant writing and application process
- **Positive feedback loop**: probability of success at future competitions increases

# Before you apply to any competition

- Carefully read the instructions, eligibility, and evaluation criteria
- Attend **all information sessions** you can
- Contact your department about the **deadlines** (e.g. Tri-Council Awards have a departmental deadline)
- Read previous **successful FRQS applications** – use them as models or templates
- **Start way ahead of time** – give yourself lots of time to draft, go through multiple revisions, and get comments from others and your supervisor
- **Apply to ALL possible competitions**

# Eligibility for the FRQS Doctoral Training Award – Qs I had

<https://frq.gouv.qc.ca/en/program/formation-de-doctorat-2022-2023/>

*I'm not from Quebec, can I still apply?*

Yes but you need to have been enrolled in a Quebec university for at least two full-time semesters in the three semesters prior to the competition deadline.

*I'm going into my second / third year of full-time doctoral training, can I still apply?*

On April 30<sup>th</sup> 2022, you cannot have completed more than fourteen semesters of your doctoral degree program. The summer semester counts as a semester.

# How is your application judged and weighed? Tailor each application based on the selection criteria

## Academic record – 30 points

- **Transcripts** and **honours** (awards, distinctions and scholarships)
- **Relevant experience** (teaching, supervision, assistantships, etc.) and scientific achievements (conferences, presentations, publications, etc.)
- Applicant's ability to present his or her background in an **integrated manner** (relationship between experiences and interests and career and education choices, trajectory, etc.)

## Research project – 45 points

- **Originality** of the project and contribution to the **advancement of knowledge**
- **Clarity** and coherence of the research problem
- Relevance of the **methodology**
- **Feasibility** (realism of the time frame, quality of supervision including the environment available to the applicant for his or her development and the realization of the project, etc.)

## Social mobilization – 20 points

- Ability to **facilitate dialogue between science and society** (outreach activities or participation in events intended for the general public, etc.)
- Capacity for **engagement** (volunteering, community projects, civic and non-profit involvement, event organization, etc.)
- Consideration of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, including equity, diversity and inclusion\*

## General presentation of the application – 5 points

# Main content of application – tips for each sections based on personal experience and application criteria

## 1. Title (French and English) and research domains / key words

- Avoid jargon and acronyms in your title
- **Choose your key words strategically:** they will determine which reviewer is assigned to your application

## 2. Summary of the research proposal (French and English)

- Small paragraph intended for the lay public
- Get input from non-scientific friends / family
- Open with a broad sentence that places your research into context: *why should people care?*
- End with a sentence that indicates how society will benefit from your research

### 3. University background

- Degrees, universities
- International experience
- **Official transcripts:** need a minimum of a B+ to be considered eligible - order ahead of time to not scramble

### 4. Prizes and awards

- Be **precise:** indicate value, length, placement (if possible)
- International awards are weighed more heavily than national and local ones
- **Does not only have to be scholarships:** enumerate poster awards, talk prizes, travel awards (all small things can make a difference)

## 5. Presentation of your scientific path

Take the reader on a chronological journey of your scientific path (1 page max).

1. What sparked your interest in research?
2. What attracted you to your current field?
3. Why did you choose your current institution and lab?

**IMPORTANT:** can re-highlight important awards / experiences: entrance scholarships, international internships, teaching opportunities, volunteering, travel awards, conference talks / prizes...

**Relate events from your scientific journey to your interest in your current project.**

The reviewers need to see that you have a **genuine interest in research**, are mature, and have chosen your current lab and institution based on the offered research program and experience.

## 7. Pertinent experiences and scientific contributions

### *Personal experience*

1. **Mentorship:** TA, undergraduate, department workshops (presentation of a technique...), mentor an experiment...
2. **Internships:** mandatory or not – was it your **initiative**?

### *Scientific contributions*

1. **Conferences** (specify if you gave a poster or talk and if you were invited, received a travel award, or a presentation prize)
2. **Publications:** elaborate how you contributed to this publication

*Do you need a first author publication for a successful application?*

Not necessarily but it definitely helps. Try to get your paper at least in review by the application deadline – there is a section to explain this (average publication time in high IF is two years).

## 8. Research proposal – HEAVILY WEIGHED

*How to make your research proposal a pleasant and flowy read / how to summarize 3 – 4 years of research plan into 2 pages?*

- Space it out: don't cram everything into two pages
  - Use diagrams
  - Define jargon, limit acronyms
  - Have headers, highlight important statements in bold, underline conclusions: you want to draw the reviewers' attention to the key and critical sentences
1. Problem and hypothesis
  2. **Objectives**: have distinct aims that build on each other
  3. **Methods**: what methods will you use in your specific aims and why: ChIP-seq, single-cell RNA-seq...
  4. **Feasibility**: prior experience, lab expertise, time
  5. Potential **pitfalls** and pivot points in your project: important – shows that you have good scientific judgement and critical thinking
  6. Contribution / **impact statement**

If you are not in your first year, write up a “**progress to date**” section in your introduction to highlight productivity

## 9. Knowledge translation

Proper scientific communication is **CRITICAL** (as we have seen during the COVID-19 pandemic)

- Groups / committees that you have been part of? (e.g. Canadian Epigenetics, Environment and Health Research Consortium (CEEHRC) Trainee Committee)
- Conferences tailored to medical doctors / policy makers?
- Blog / website / school outreach?

Your supervisor needs to fill a form on the FRQ-S portal but you don't need references

# Last words of advice

- Get a couple of scientists outside and within your field to read over your proposal – the more input the better!
- Really take some time to figure out how you can make your application stand out
- Do not brag but objectively state your accomplishments
- Results are usually released mid- end of April. Forget about your application during the wait!
- Rejection is common in academia
  - Don't get discouraged and try again if you don't succeed – my first FRQ-S / CIHR-CGS-D rounds were (very) unsuccessful but scored in the top 5% the following year

# Questions?

E-mail me anytime if you have questions: [ariane.lismer@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:ariane.lismer@mail.mcgill.ca)

I'd also be happy to read over your research proposal and give you my thoughts 😊