Call for Applications:
MI4 Pfizer Early Career Investigator Award – Year 3

PLEASE NOTE NEW THEMES FOR THIS YEAR'S COMPETITION

1. Background and Description of Award

1.1. Background

The current Call for Applications (CFA) provides the details to apply for the third McGill Interdisciplinary Initiative in Infection and Immunity (MI4) Pfizer Early Career Investigator Award (ECA) competition.

The overarching goal of MI4 is to bring together investigators from across the McGill community and its partners to foster interdisciplinary research. With a re-focussing of its scope in 2022, MI4 supports efforts to discover, develop, and implement innovative solutions for **microbial threats** to human health across the lifespan.

With this donation from Pfizer Canada, early career scientists and researchers across the McGill and MUHC community have an opportunity to carry out research across three broad thematic areas: **Pandemic Threats, Antimicrobial Resistance, Microbes that Shape Human Health.**

Two $100,000 awards are awarded annually. This fund will support a total of 6 awards over three years.

Applications must be aligned with MI4's scope of health research (see Section 2.2). Applications will be ranked by the criteria described in Section 8 below.

In recognition of the role the MUHC Foundation and McGill University Advancement play in securing these funds, at least one ECA will be awarded to an MUHC investigator. The second ECA will be awarded to an investigator based at McGill or any McGill-affiliated site (non-MUHC).

Both PhDs and MDs are encouraged to apply and, when possible, awards will be given to one PhD and one MD.

1.2. Key Dates:

- Launch of MI4 Pfizer ECA – Year 3: May 12, 2023
- **ECA application deadline:** **June 26, 2023, 11:59 PM Eastern Time**
- Evaluation period: June 27 to July 31, 2023 (TBC)
- ECA announcement to applicants: August 2023 (TBC)

2. MI4 Pfizer Early Career Investigator Award - Funding Available and Funding Cycles

2.1. Objectives of the ECA Program

The objective of the Early Career Investigator Award program is to provide promising new investigators with support for preliminary and proof-of-concept studies that will position them to secure external funding.

2.2. Scope
The ECA program supports investigators that undertake innovative research within the MI4 scope across three major themes of health research: <u>Pandemic Threats</u>, <u>Antimicrobial Resistance</u>, and <u>Microbes that Shape Human Health</u>. Projects can include, but are not limited to:
- fundamental research
- clinical research
- population level studies
- health services research
- social science or health economics.

2.3. Eligibility
The applicant must meet the conditions of University Researcher or Clinical University Researcher as defined by the Fonds de Recherche du Québec (found here). In accordance with the CIHR definition of an early career investigator, the applicant must be less than 5 years from their first faculty appointment at the time of submission. This period of eligibility may also be extended by parental or other University-approved leaves of absence. The applicant must have obtained a full-time professional degree (MD) or PhD degree or equivalent and must devote a minimum of 50% of their time to research for the duration of the award.

The ECA is supported by funds held at the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC-RI) and McGill University. Accordingly, an ECA requires investigators to be based at either the MUHC-RI or McGill University, which includes non-MUHC-RI sites (i.e., the Montreal Neurological Institute-Hospital, Jewish General Hospital, the Douglas Institute). An investigator's location is defined as the primary location where their research is conducted and funds are held.

An applicant will only be eligible to receive one ECA award. However, if an applicant is not successful in the current award competition, they may apply again the following year.

Investigators with outstanding MI4 final reports and/or other deliverables from other competitions will not be eligible to apply.

2.4. Available Funds and Funding Term
In the current round of the MI4 Pfizer ECA program, funds are available to support two investigators at $100,000 each for a term of 12 months. MI4 Pfizer ECA funds are non-renewable and unspent funds must be returned to MI4 at the end of this period.

3. Submission Deadline and Procedure

The deadline for submissions is June 26, 2023, at 11:59 PM Eastern Time.

Applications must be submitted by email in PDF format to grantsmcgilli4.med@mcgill.ca, copying admincoordmcgilli4.med@mcgill.ca and mi4programmgr.med@mcgill.ca.

4. Additional Information

If additional information is required to complete the MI4 Pfizer ECA submission, please contact admincoordmcgilli4.med@mcgill.ca. Generally, a response will be provided within two business days.

5. MI4 Pfizer ECA Submission Package

Free-Form Project Description (9.5 pages maximum, extra material will not be reviewed).

Use the same headings for each section as shown below and respect the required page length per section.

1. *Project Information* (1 page)
    1.1. Project Title
    1.2. Lay Summary (max 200 words)
    1.3. McGill or MUHC-RI Investigator: MD or PhD, department, location, email
    1.4. Project duration and budget requested
    1.5. Suggested reviewers **EXTERNAL TO MCGILL INSTITUTIONS** (3 names, positions, and email addresses)

2. *Project Description* (4 pages, including figures, excluding references)

    2.1. Research Rationale
    Explain the research question and concept behind the research and justify the novelty of your idea.

    2.2. *Primary Deliverables*
    Provide up to three, in brief bullet points.

    2.3. Background Research (last 5 years)
    Summarize previous work leading up to the proposed project. Note that preliminary data is not required.

    2.4. Proposed Research Activities
    *   Briefly describe the proposed study and how the proposed experiments will be conducted. Employ language that is comprehensible to an interdisciplinary scientific review panel.
    *   Provide clear 6 and 12-month milestones (i.e., interim achievements along a path towards the project deliverable) that can be used by MI4 to assess progress of the research.
    *   Describe the research outputs and their impact and provide metrics where possible. Avoid general phrases such as new knowledge, better understanding, or highly qualified personnel (HQP) training.

3. *Project Team - Ability of Applicant and Team to Implement the* **Project** (1 page)
    *   Describe the expertise of the Principal Investigator and how this expertise will support the conduct of the proposed research.
    *   Describe the role and expertise of co-investigators, collaborators, trainees, or research associates.
    *   Discuss Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) of the Project Team, (two useful resources are NSERC's EDI Guide for Applicants and CIHR's EDI considerations)
    *   See sub-section 9 for CV attachment requirements.

4. *Long-Term Plan* (0.5 page)
One of the major objectives of the ECA program is to enable researchers to apply for external funding using the data and experience gained during their year of support. In this section, describe the potential grant opportunities that will be pursued and their anticipated submission dates. Please include the mentoring plan that has been put in place for the early career investigator.

5. *Letter of support from departmental or divisional director* (1 page)
Given that the goal of this proposal is to catalyze a research project by an early career investigator, provide a letter of support from the departmental / divisional director that outlines the mentoring plan and the support / resources being provided. For MD applicants, this letter must also state the percent protected time for research during the tenure of this award.

6. *Budget* (1 page)
Provide a detailed budget covering the 12-month grant term. Clearly indicate the site where funds will be spent (See Section 7 - Eligible Costs). The investigator's budget cannot exceed $100,000. Please declare any potential overlap in your budget that is currently being funded by another source.

7. *Indication of Consent to Share Elements of Proposal with External Donors*
Fundraising is an important part of the MI4 mandate. Indicate your consent for MI4 to share each of the following elements of your proposal with external donors in the future, should an appropriate opportunity arise. The applicants' response in this section will have no bearing on ECA assessment. Please include the following text in your proposal and indicate the appropriate response.

I allow MI4 to share the following elements of this application with potentially interested external donors:
1. Title	Yes/No
2. Lay Summary	Yes/No
3. Full Proposal	Yes/No

8. *References* (1 page)

9. *CV & Signature page*
We ask that the CV to be limited to 5 pages. Remember to include the NIH Bio-Sketch, using the format provided here, to your CV package. We accept submissions in PDF format only.

Clearly indicate the date of the first academic appointment and any relevant leave information. Documentation of approved leaves may be requested by MI4 but are not required for the initial submission.

Please have all Co-PIs and collaborators sign to acknowledge their role in your project (found here).

6. **Submission Format and Procedure**

The free form document and CVs must adhere to the following format:

- Page size: 8½ x 11 inches
- Margins: no less than 2.54 cm (1 inch) on all sides

- Font: Times New Roman (12 pts) or Arial (11 pts)
- Header: include your name
- Graphs and illustrations may be included and may be in colour (if they are of high enough quality to be legible upon printing) but will count as part of the set page limits for each section.
- Assemble the Free-Form Project Description and CV into one PDF package with bookmarks. Please include page numbers.
- Title the PDF file using your last name. For example: "Early Career Award_Smith.pdf"
- If the Free-Form Project Description exceeds the maximum page limit, it will not be reviewed.

7. **Awarding Funds, Eligible Costs**

   7.1. Awarding funds
   Funds for successful MI4 Pfizer ECA awards will be disbursed to their respective institutions in a single payment.

   7.2. Eligible Costs
   All costs must be in compliance and compatible with the policies and guidelines of the PI's institution, as well as the Tri-Agency Financial Administration Guide (TAFAG), and must clearly align with proposed activities outlined in Section 2.4. This award may not be used to provide salary support for the applicant.

   The following are the only eligible costs:
   - Salary support for trainees and research personnel (includes benefits)
   - Materials and supplies (consumables)
   - Core or platform fees for project related samples or data
   - Data evaluation costs by appropriate research experts
   - Small equipment up to $5,000 total
   - Appropriately justified project-related travel

   Please note that final decisions regarding budget eligibility will be made by MI4 leadership.

   7.3. Overhead
   There is no acceptable overhead component to the MI4 Pfizer ECA award. All the awarded funds are to be directed towards eligible costs.

8. **Review**

   8.1. Assessment Criteria
   ECA submissions will be evaluated according to the following assessment criteria:

   40% Project:
   - Originality and innovation of the proposed research.
   - Well-defined research outputs and metrics, appropriate for an early career investigator.
   - Feasibility of the proposed research.

   20% Training:
   - Training and previous productivity of the applicant.

20% Mentorship environment
- Mentoring plan and availability of support.

20% Future Directions
- The plan for applicant to apply for external funding using the data and experience gained during their Early Career Award.

8.2. Review Process and Funding Approval Time Frame

ECA submissions will be reviewed in three stages:

Step 1: Due Diligence: The MI4 Executive Committee (Director and Co-Directors), along with the MI4 Program Manager, will conduct a due diligence review of the submissions to validate the required elements in the submission package (Section 5). Submissions that do not comply will be eliminated from further review and applicants will receive a summary of missing elements or deficiencies.

Step 2: Scientific Review Committee (SRC): A SRC comprising a majority of members external to the MUHC-RI/McGill community will evaluate and rank the submissions according to the Assessment Criteria (Section 8.1) and provide recommendations regarding the top ranked submissions.

Step 3: Approval by the MI4 Executive Committee: The MI4 Executive Committee will validate the review process, consider the recommendations of the SRC, and approve the final list of awards at $100,000 per submission.

Conflict of Interest (COI): MI4 will adopt a COI policy to ensure that anyone participating in the review process does not have a COI. Any person declaring a COI, or a potential COI, will be required to recuse themselves from the review process. COIs will be defined using the CIHR definition that can be found here.

9. Approval and Award Agreement

MI4 will contact applicants with the funding decision comprising one of the following formats:
- Approved "as is".
- Approved with recommendations to be incorporated into the research activities.
- Not approved with inclusion of any feedback provided by the SRC.

An Award Agreement and Fund Release Agreement Form will be sent to the successful applicants outlining the terms and conditions of the award. Awardees will be asked to sign and return the award agreement as a proof that they accept the award and its terms. Documentation of appropriate biohazard, radioactive, animal use, Stem Cell Oversight Committee (SCOC), and ethics approvals will be required for the release of funds.

10. Reporting Requirements

All approved ECA awards will be required to supply a brief progress report (template format) after the first six months and after 12 months. The MI4 Executive Committee, with the MI4 Program Manager, will review the report and make recommendations.