McGill | M[i]4 Interdisciplinary Initiative in Infection and Immunity

Overcoming Barriers to COVID-19 Vaccination Research Funding

Background and Description of Funding Opportunity

The development and delivery of an effective vaccine against SARS-CoV-2 is our most promising exit strategy from the COVID-19 pandemic. With multiple candidates in Phase III clinical trials, it is likely that one or more vaccines will be approved within the next 6 months. Widespread use of new vaccines will be critical for the development of herd immunity, and ending the COVID-19 pandemic. There are multiple challenges to be overcome for an effective and equitable vaccine rollout strategy including concerns about vaccine efficacy and safety, cultural attitudes towards vaccination, misinformation and gaps in scientific communication, education and outreach, and the costs and logistics of vaccine distribution and administration.

This MI4 funding opportunity is seeking innovative proposals that address barriers to COVID-19 vaccine delivery. This opportunity provides one-time funding of up to $100,000 for 6-month projects that seek to provide solutions for barriers to effective and equitable vaccination. Projects should be solution-oriented. Proposals seeking to identify or understand barriers without the development of mitigating strategies will not be considered. A funding envelope of up to $500,000 is available for this opportunity.

Key Dates

- Call for Proposals: October 21, 2020
- **Application deadline: November 23, 2020**
- Evaluation period: November 23 – December 7, 2020
- Announcement of competition results: December 7, 2020 (TBC)

1. Funding Opportunity

1.1. Objectives of the Funding Opportunity

To rapidly provide solutions for barriers to effective and equitable delivery of COVID-19 vaccines.

1.2. Scope

The program will support innovative approaches that will provide answers within a 6-month timeframe.

1.3. Team composition

MI4 grants can be held at any McGill University Department or McGill University-affiliated Research institute. **Subcontracts to investigators outside McGill University and its affiliated institutions must be clearly justified.**

1.4. Eligibility

The Principal Investigators must hold a McGill appointment.

1.5. Available funds

Currently an envelope of up to $500,000 has been reserved for this program. Further funds may be allocated to this program as they become available.

1.6. Grant term

Grants will be for a period of 6 months and will be non-renewable. Unspent funds must be returned to MI4 at the end of this period, or if other external support for the project is obtained.

2. Submission Deadline

The deadline for submissions is November 23, 2020 at 11:59 PM Eastern Time.

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

3. Additional Information

If additional information is required to complete the proposal submission, please contact admincoordmcgilli4.med@mcgill.ca . Generally, a response will be provided within 1 business day.

4. Application Package

Free-Form Project Description (5 pages total + CVs, extra material will not be reviewed).
Use the same headers for each section as shown below and respect the required page length per section.

4.1 Cover page (1 page)

4.1.1 Project Title
4.1.2 Lay Summary (a single short paragraph written for a non-scientific audience)
4.1.3 Collaborators

4.2 Project Description (2 pages max)

4.2.1 Research Rationale and Background

Explain the research question and concept behind the research and justify the novelty of your idea. State how your research will help to address coronavirus outbreaks.

4.2.2 Proposed research activities

- Briefly, describe the proposed study and timeline for the proposed experiments. Employ language that is comprehensible to an interdisciplinary scientific audience.
- Describe the specific research outputs and their impact in improving vaccine delivery provide metrics where possible. Avoid general outcomes such as new knowledge, better understanding, or highly qualified personnel (HQP) training.
- Provide a strategy for knowledge translation (KT). Consult https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29418.html#1 for guidance on approaches to KT.

4.3 Budget (1 page max)

Provide a brief budget, not to exceed $100,000 over the 6-month period (See Section 7 - Eligible Costs)

4.4 References (1 page max)

4.5 CVs

Using the NIH Bio-Sketch format (https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biosketch.htm), attach to the main package the CV of the applicant and a maximum of two other key project team members. Please limit the CV to 5 pages and only PDF format is acceptable.

5. Submission Format and Procedure

The free form document and the 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 (no smaller than 12 pts) or Arial (no smaller than 11 pts).
- Assemble the Free-Form and CVs into PDF package with bookmarks; each page to be consecutively numbered.
- 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.
- If the Free-Form Project Description exceeds the maximum page limit it will not be reviewed.

6. Eligible Costs

Funds for successful awards will be disbursed in one installment.

Eligible Costs: Only the following are eligible costs:

- Salary support for trainees and research personnel (include benefits)
- Materials and supplies (consumables)
- Core or platform fees for project related samples or data
- Data evaluation costs by appropriate research experts

Overhead: There is no overhead component to this award. All the awarded funds are to be directed towards eligible costs.

7. Review

7.1. Assessment Criteria

Submissions will be evaluated by an internal committee comprising of directors of MI4 not applying to the competition and representatives of the McGill Research Community. Proposals will be adjudicated based on their degree of innovation, feasibility (including strength and experience of the research team), and potential impact. Partnerships with Provincial, Federal or Public Health Agencies are strongly encouraged and will be considered a strength for proposals.

7.2. Review Process and Funding Approval Time Frame

Review will be undertaken within the 2 weeks following the close of the competition period. Every effort will be made to release funding within one month of project adjudications.

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 at: http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/46378.html.

8. Approval Agreement

MI4 will contact the PI with the funding decision following grant review. A fund release agreement will be sent to the awarded PI outlining the terms and conditions of the award. Awardees are asked to sign and return the award agreement as a proof that they accept the award and its terms. Documentation of appropriate ethics approvals will be required for the use of funds. For grants held at McGill University, completion of an OSR checklist is required

9. Reporting Requirements and Evaluation of Progress

All approved MI4 awards will be required to provide a preliminary progress report after three months of the grant period, and a final report (template format) at the end of the 6-month funding period. Investigators with outstanding progress reporting will be ineligible for future MI4 funding initiatives.