

Request for Proposals:

MI4-Pathy Seed Fund Grant

1. Background and Description of Funding Opportunity

1.1. Background

The current Request for Proposal (RFP) provides the details to apply for the McGill Interdisciplinary Initiative in Infection and Immunity (MI4)-Pathy Seed Fund Grant (SFG) competition. This sixth round of Seed Fund Grants is made possible by a generous donation from the Pathy Family Foundation.

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, MI4 supports efforts to discover, develop and implement innovative solutions for **microbial threats** to human health across the lifespan.

All proposals must be aligned with the study of infection through one of the following three broad thematic areas: **Pandemic Threats, Antimicrobial Resistance, Microbes that Shape Human Health**. There will be a maximum of four grants funded under this RFP. All applications will be ranked by the same criteria described in Section 8.2 below, and the highest-ranked submissions in each thematic area will be funded. At least one SFG will be awarded to a team that includes an early-stage investigator (less than 10 years from first faculty appointment). If none of the highest-ranked submissions in each thematic area is awarded to a team that includes an early-stage investigator, the fourth grant will be awarded to the highest ranked submission which includes an early-stage investigator, irrespective of thematic area. After an early-stage investigator has been funded, any remaining grant will be awarded according to ranking within the pool of all submissions, irrespective of thematic area.

1.2. Key Dates:

- Launch of MI4-Pathy SFG: November 13, 2023
- **SFG application deadline: January 12, 2024, 11:59 PM Eastern Standard Time**
- Evaluation period: January 12, 2024 to March 1, 2024 (TBC)
- SFG announcement to applicants: April 2024 (TBC)

2. MI4-Pathy Seed Fund Grant - Funding Available and Funding Cycles

2.1. Objectives of the SFG Program

- To establish new, interdisciplinary translational research teams across multiple McGill sites. MI4 uses the contemporary definition of interdisciplinary as: combining or involving several academic disciplines or professional specializations in an approach to a topic or problem.
- To support preliminary and proof-of-concept studies by these collaborative research teams that will position them to secure external funding. The goal is to seed new research, not to replace conventional sources of funding for already-established programs or to serve as bridge funding for established programs. New teams involve two lead investigators who have not published together in the past 5 years.

2.2. Scope

The SFG program supports innovative approaches that address one or more of the MI4 thematic areas with a general focus on infection. The proposed research must be interdisciplinary and the two co-PIs should represent different fields of expertise. Examples include, but are not limited to: microbiology and biostatistics, vaccinology and social science.

2.3. Team Composition

This SFG round is co-funded by the Pathy Family Foundation with the funds located at the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre (RI-MUHC) and matching funds located at McGill University. Accordingly, each SFG application requires two co-Principal Investigators: one from the RI-MUHC, and one from McGill University (any non-RI-MUHC site including other McGill affiliated hospitals and research institutes such as the MNI, JGH). An investigator's location is defined as the primary location where their research team is located. For the purpose of MI4 funding, MNI researchers are considered to be McGill University and not RI-MUHC. The inclusion of other McGill community investigators as collaborators is encouraged, but only two co-Principal Investigators are permitted. Investigators external to the McGill community are welcome to join the project team as collaborators, but may not be co-Principal Investigators. **Subcontracts to investigators outside McGill University and its affiliated institutions are only permitted under exceptional, well justified conditions, subject to MI4 approval.**

2.4. Eligibility

The Principal Investigators must meet the conditions of University Researcher or Clinical University Researcher as defined by the Fonds de Recherche du Québec ([frqs-generales-communes](https://www.fondsdecherchequebec.com/frqs-generales-communes)). In accordance with the appropriate RI-MUHC and McGill policies, a researcher devotes more than 50% of their time to research and teaching.

A researcher may participate in two SFG applications but will only be eligible to receive one (1) SFG award per cycle as co-Principal Investigator, to a maximum of two concurrently-held SFG awards. Applicants with multiple appointments must apply through the institution where their primary funds are located. This affiliation cannot switch between MI4 SFG competitions unless the primary source of funds have changed.

2.5. Available Funds and Grant Term

In the current round of the MI4-Pathy SFG program, funds are available to support up to four grants for a maximum of \$150,000 each for a grant term of 24 months. MI4 SFG awards are non-renewable and unspent funds must be returned to the source from which the funds originated (either RI-MUHC or McGill) at the end of this period.

3. Submission Deadline and Procedure

The deadline for submissions is January 12, 2024 at 11:59 PM Eastern Standard Time.

All applications must be submitted by email in PDF format to grantsmcgill4.med@mcgill.ca, copying admincoordmcgill4.med@mcgill.ca and mi4programmgr.med@mcgill.ca.

4. Additional Information

If additional information is required to complete the MI4-Pathy SFG submission, please contact admincoordmcgilli4.med@mcgill.ca. Generally, a response will be provided within one business day.

5. MI4-Pathy SFG 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. Selected MI4 Theme, namely Pandemic Threats, Antimicrobial Resistance, Microbes that Shape Human Health. Please state which microbes you are studying.
- 1.4. McGill and RI-MUHC Co-Principal Investigators: department, location, email (2 only)
- 1.5. Collaborators
- 1.6. Project duration and budget requested
- 1.7. Suggested reviewers **EXTERNAL TO MCGILL INSTITUTIONS** (3 names, positions and email addresses)

2. *Project Description* (5 pages, including figures, excluding references)

2.1. *Research Rationale and selected MI4 Thematic Area*

Explain the research question and concept behind the research and justify the novelty of your idea. Identify which broad thematic area the proposal best aligns with: Pandemic Threats, Antimicrobial Resistance, Microbes that Shape Human Health.

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. Preliminary data is not required and projects for which extensive preliminary data is available should be submitted to traditional granting agencies.

2.4. *Proposed Research Activities*

- Briefly describe the proposed study and timeline for the proposed experiments. Employ language that is comprehensible to an interdisciplinary scientific audience.

- Provide clear 12- and 24-month milestones (i.e. interim achievements along a path towards the project deliverables) that can be used to assess measurable progress of the proposal and that will demonstrate ongoing collaboration between the two co-PIs.
- 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 Team to Implement the Project (1 page)

- Describe the expertise of the co-Principal Investigators and how the interdisciplinary nature of the team will help achieve the project's goals.
- Describe the role and expertise of co-principal investigators, collaborators, trainees or research associates.
- Discuss Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) of the Project Team, (two useful links are [http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/doc/EDI/Guide for Applicants EN.pdf](http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/doc/EDI/Guide%20for%20Applicants_EN.pdf) and <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/50836.html>)
- See sub-section 8 for CV attachment requirements.

4. Long-Term Plan (0.5 page)

One of the major objectives of the SFG program is to enable researchers to apply for external funding using the data and experience gained during the SFG project. Describe in this section the anticipated grant opportunities that will be pursued, and the anticipated submission dates.

5. Budget (1 page)

Provide a detailed budget covering the 24-month grant term using the Budget worksheet available at: https://www.mcgill.ca/mi4/files/mi4/mi4_sfg_budget_template_nov_2023.xlsx. Each individual co-PI's budget cannot exceed \$75,000, and modifications to this worksheet are not permitted. Please declare any potential overlap in your budget that is currently being funded by another source.

6. Indication of Consent to Share Elements of Proposal with External Donors

Fundraising for infection and immunity research 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 SFG proposal assessment. Please include the following text in your proposal and indicate the appropriate response.

I allow MI4 to share the following elements of this proposal with potentially interested external donors:

- | | |
|------------------|--------|
| 1. Title | Yes/No |
| 2. Lay Summary | Yes/No |
| 3. Full Proposal | Yes/No |

7. *References* (1 page)

8. *CVs & Signature page*

Using the NIH Bio-Sketch format (<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biosketch.htm>), attach to the main package the CV of the two co-applicants and a maximum of two other key project team members. Please limit the CV to 5 pages and only PDF format is acceptable. **Please have all Co-PIs and collaborators sign to acknowledge their role in your project ([Signature page template](#)).**

6. 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)
- Header: include the names of the co-PIs
- 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 and CVs into one PDF package with bookmarks; each page to be consecutively numbered.
- Title the PDF file using the last names of both co-PIs. For example: “Smith & Rutherford.pdf”
- If the Free-Form Project Description exceeds the maximum page limit, it will not be reviewed.

7. Eligible Costs, Cost Sharing between co-PIs

7.1. Cost Sharing

Funds will be awarded equally to each co-PI. The funds are not transferrable between co-PIs. Funds for successful MI4-PATHY SFG awards will be disbursed in two equal payments: the first at the start of the project and the second at 13 months, contingent on submission and approval of a 12-month progress report (see Section 10).

7.2. Eligible Costs

All budgeted items must be in compliance and compatible with the policies and guidelines of the co-PIs’ respective institutions, as well as the Tri-Agency Financial Administration Guide (TAFAG) (<https://www.mcgill.ca/research/ran-welcome/tri-agency-administration>), and must clearly align with proposed activities outlined in Section 2.4.

Only the following are 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 for each co-Principal Investigator
- 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-Pathy SFG award. All the awarded funds are to be directed towards eligible costs.

8. Review

8.1. Assessment Criteria

SFG submissions will be evaluated according the following equal-weighted assessment criteria:

- Originality and innovation of the proposed research
- Well-defined research outputs and metrics, appropriate for the career stage of the investigator
- Interdisciplinary nature of the research
- Expertise of the co-PIs, and entire Project Team and synergies created by the interdisciplinary approach
- The plan for the co-PIs to apply for external funding using the data and experience gained during the SFG project.

8.2. Review Process and Funding Approval Time Frame

SFG submissions will be reviewed in three stages:

Step 1 Due Diligence: The MI4 Executive Committee (Director and Co-Directors), with the MI4 Program Manager, will conduct a due diligence review of the SFG submission 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 RI-MUHC/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 Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC): The MI4 SAC will validate the review process, review the recommendations of the SRC, and approve the final list of awards for Round 6 up to a maximum of \$150,000 per submission, up to the funding available (\$600,000 in Round 6).

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>.

9. Approval and Grant Agreement

MI4 will contact applicant co-PIs with the funding decision comprising one of the following formats:

- Approved “as is”.
- Approved with recommendations to be incorporated into the project activities.
- Not approved with inclusion of any feedback provided by SRC.

A Grant Agreement and Fund Release Agreement Form will be sent to the awarded co-PIs 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 and Evaluation of Progress

All approved SFG awards will be required to provide a brief progress report (template format) after the first 12 months and after 24 months. Release of the second funding installment will be contingent on demonstration of successful progress with respect to the project plan as detailed in the 12-month progress report (Section 5, sub-section 2.4). The MI4 Executive Committee, with the MI4 Program Manager, will review the report and make a recommendation to the SAC. Following review of the progress report, MI4 may also suggest an alternate project plan, or reduce the amount of the second installment of funds.