

RESPONSIBLE INTELLIGENCE FOR SOCIETY & ETHICS (RISE) CALL FOR PROPOSALS FALL 2026

CONTEXT

The Canada First Research Excellence Fund (CFREF) aims to strengthen Canadian postsecondary institutions so that they can achieve international success in research domains that create social and economic advantages for Canada in the long-term.

[Connected Minds](#) and [IVADO](#) are two of Canada's flagship initiatives funded by the CFREF program, with a mandate to advance interdisciplinary research at the intersection of artificial intelligence, neuroscience, and society. In this context, a joint Responsible Intelligence for Society & Ethics (RISE) Seed Grant funding initiative is proposed to leverage complementary strengths and catalyze innovative, high-impact collaborations in Neuro-AI and AI Ethics. This approach is fully aligned with CFREF's mandate to support transformational, cross-institutional research.

IVADO is an interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral research and knowledge mobilization consortium whose mission is to develop and promote a robust, reasoning and responsible AI. Led by Université de Montréal with four university partners (Polytechnique Montréal, HEC Montréal, Université Laval and McGill University)- collectively referred to as U5, IVADO brings together research centers, government bodies and industry members to co-build ambitious cross-sectoral initiatives with the goal of fostering a paradigm shift for AI and its adoption.

Based at York and Queen's Universities, the Connected Minds Program integrates three 'pillars' of academic expertise (Society, Neuroscience & Behavior, Intelligent Technologies) and 50+ partner organizations, in order to understand how the interplay of humans and intelligent technologies produces unexpected, emergent properties at the community/whole society levels; predict how new technologies will disrupt our evolving techno-social collective; and use these predictions to co-create new research and technology development.

OBJECTIVES

This call for proposals aims to strengthen collaboration between Connected Minds and IVADO by fostering meaningful, interdisciplinary partnerships that leverage complementary expertise. It seeks to support innovative, high-impact research on two priority domains: **Neuro-AI** and **AI Ethics**.

Through this initiative, the program encourages teams to develop cutting-edge approaches that meet the following criteria:

- significantly advance scientific knowledge and generate novel insights within the identified priority areas;
- promote robust, responsible and ethical AI development;
- build sustainable research linkages and knowledge exchange across Connected Minds and IVADO; and
- support the training and mentorship of students by providing them with opportunities to actively participate in collaborative and innovative research projects.

AI must constitute a significant and central component of the proposed project. Its use should be innovative and ambitious, going beyond conventional data analysis methods. Applicants must demonstrate the expertise required to successfully deliver the project's AI-related activities.

While these objectives apply to both domains, area-specific priorities have been identified.

NEURO-AI

This stream will support interdisciplinary teams developing novel approaches at the intersection of neuroscience and artificial intelligence, integrating Connected Minds' expertise in neural systems and behaviour with IVADO's strengths in machine learning and computational modelling. Projects could explore areas such as biologically inspired AI systems, brain-informed algorithms, neural data-driven model development, closed-loop neurotechnology, and AI systems that learn from and interact with human cognition in naturalistic settings.

AI ETHICS

This stream will support collaborations focused on the ethical, societal, and governance dimensions of AI, particularly as they relate to human-centred and neurotechnology applications. By combining Connected Minds' focus on human experience, equity, and societal impact with IVADO's leadership in responsible AI frameworks, projects could develop ethically grounded AI systems informed by real-world human data, with particular attention to algorithmic fairness, transparency, accessibility, and the mitigation of bias in AI deployment. *Beyond technical design, this extends to ethical AI development and governance processes, their broader community-level impacts, and data governance frameworks that respect collective rights and interests, such as Indigenous data sovereignty.*

FUNDING

Up to three (3) research projects will be funded: one in each stream, plus one additional project that aligns with either stream and has a substantive

focus on Indigeneity or is led by an Indigenous PI or Co-PI. Each project may receive up to **\$125,000** for a **one (1) year** funding period.

Following adjudication, the highest-ranked proposal in each stream will be recommended for funding. If no proposals in one stream are deemed fundable, the available funding may be reallocated to the other stream. In addition, the highest-ranked eligible proposal with a substantive focus on Indigeneity or led by an Indigenous PI or Co-PI will be recommended for funding.

Funding for the awards is jointly provided by **Connected Minds at York University, Connected Minds at Queen's University, and IVADO**. IVADO's contribution will be distributed across all funded projects, while the Connected Minds contribution is equally allocated between York University and Queen's University. The final distribution of funding will reflect the institutional composition of the successful teams and may be distributed across projects involving researchers from both York and Queen's.

- The funding is non-renewable and must be fully utilized within the designated one-year period.
- No extensions will be granted under any circumstances, and any unspent funds at the end of the funding period will not be carried forward.
- Eligible expenses include: salaries (postdoc, highly qualified research professionals), student stipends, material, equipment, and services required to carry out the research.

IMPORTANT DATES

LOI Launch: October 5, 2026

LOI Submissions Due: November 9, 2026

Invitation to Full Application Stage: December 14, 2026

Full Submissions Due: February 18, 2027

Announcements Made: March 15, 2027

ELIGIBILITY

Affiliation of the principal and co-principal applicants to either Connected Minds or IVADO is essential, and must respect the following criteria:

CONNECTED MINDS

- Be a registered member of the program

- Be a full-time Faculty Member at York or Queen's

IVADO

- Hold an academic or research position at one of the U5 (Université de Montréal, HEC, Polytechnique Montréal, McGill University, Université Laval)

TEAM COMPOSITION

In order to cement the collaboration between Connected Minds and IVADO, RISE projects must be led by a team of at least two professors, one being from Connected Minds and the other being from one of IVADO's U5 (Université de Montréal, Polytechnique Montréal, HEC Montréal, Université Laval or McGill University).

Position	Number per project	Eligible affiliation	Role
Principal Investigator(s)	1 or 2	Connected Minds York, Connected Minds Queen's, or IVADO U5. Collectively, the PIs and Co-PIs must include at least one Connected Minds member from York University, one Connected Minds member from Queen's University, and one eligible member from any IVADO U5 institution.	• Primary point of contact for all communications with both Connected Minds and IVADO • Overall leadership and coordination of the project (including appropriate oversight and management of the project budget) • Responsible for submitting the final financial and scientific project reports

Co-Principal Investigator(s)	1 or 2	Connected Minds York, Connected Minds Queen's, or IVADO U5. The combined PI and Co-PI team must satisfy the mandatory representation requirements outlined above.	• Contribution to the design, development, and execution of the research program • Bring complementary expertise, support coordination between the two groups • Actively participate in achieving the project's scientific and collaborative objectives
Co-investigator(s)	0 to 4	Connected Minds, IVADO U5, investigators from a Canadian or international university,	• Support the design and execution of the project • Contribute specialized knowledge • Foster interdisciplinary collaboration
Collaborators	As required	Government bodies, non-profit or community organisations, private industries	• Support the design and execution of the project • Contribute specialized knowledge

Proposals should aim to include a balanced representation of applicants from Connected Minds and IVADO to ensure meaningful integration of perspectives and to reinforce collaborative engagement between the two groups. It is expected that the composition of research teams will reflect different stages of career, allowing for collaboration between established and early-career researchers.

Teams may include up to eight investigators and should be appropriately sized and composed for the scope, complexity, and ambition of the proposed project.

Applicants can be listed as PI or Co-PI on only one submission for this call. There is no limitation to the number of times an investigator is listed as a Co-I.

The application process consists of two stages: a **Letter of Intent (LOI)** and a **Full Proposal**.

During the LOI stage, applicants are invited to self-organize into eligible research teams and submit a brief proposal. LOIs will be reviewed by a

streamlined adjudication team with representatives from Connected Minds and IVADO.

Full Proposals will be evaluated by a joint Connected Minds–IVADO adjudication committee, which will make funding recommendations based on the published evaluation criteria.

Any project addressing Indigeneity will be further reviewed by the Connected Minds Indigenous Advisory Circle. In keeping with principles of self-determination, the Circle has the right to veto projects related to Indigenous research.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Letters of Intent (LOIs) will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Eligibility & Team Composition:** The proposed team meets the eligibility requirements of the funding call and demonstrates meaningful collaboration between Connected Minds and IVADO. Priority will be given to teams that include investigators from IVADO U5, Connected Minds at York University, and Connected Minds at Queen's University.
- **Alignment:** The proposed research aligns with the objectives of the funding call and demonstrates relevance to the priority research areas of Neuro-AI or AI Ethics.
- **Research Excellence & Transformative Impact:** The proposed project addresses an important research question with the potential to advance knowledge, generate meaningful impact, and foster future research collaboration between Connected Minds and IVADO.

Adjudication of Indigenous-Focused & Indigenous-Led Projects

Connected Minds and IVADO are committed to ensuring that research involving Indigenous Peoples, communities, lands, or knowledge systems is evaluated through culturally appropriate, respectful, and rigorous review processes.

- **IAC Adjudication Panel:** Proposals identifying a substantive focus on Indigeneity or led/co-led by Indigenous Principal Investigators will be adjudicated by a panel composed of members of the **Connected Minds Indigenous Advisory Circle (IAC)**—a body of Indigenous scholars, elders, and community experts who bring deep knowledge in Indigenous research paradigms, ethics, and community governance.

- **Self-Determination & Review Oversight:** In keeping with principles of self-determination, the IAC has final authority and veto power regarding the approval of projects involving Indigenous research.
- **Relational Ethics & Data Sovereignty:** In addition to scientific merit, IAC reviewers will evaluate the depth and authenticity of community engagement, evidence of reciprocal partnership, adherence to Indigenous data sovereignty principles (such as OCAP®, Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ), and/or Métis Data Principles, as appropriate to the communities and contexts involved), and demonstrated benefit to Indigenous communities.
- **Dual-Stream Evaluation:** Proposals meeting Indigenous criteria will be automatically evaluated both within their primary technical stream (Neuro-AI or AI Ethics) and for the dedicated Indigenous-focused grant allocation.

Link to form for LOI phase: <https://connectedminds.jotform.com/261664265797068>

The **full proposal** will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. **Research Excellence & Transformative Impact:** The proposal addresses an important research challenge in Neuro-AI or AI Ethics. The research objectives are clear, original, ambitious, and demonstrate the potential to advance knowledge and generate meaningful scientific and societal impact.
2. **Collaboration & Team Excellence:** The research team demonstrates the expertise, leadership, and complementary perspectives required to successfully deliver the proposed project. The proposal clearly demonstrates meaningful collaboration between Connected Minds and IVADO, with priority given to projects that integrate researchers from IVADO U5, Connected Minds at York University, and Connected Minds at Queen's University.
3. **Implementation & Feasibility:** The proposed research plan is well designed and feasible within the one-year funding period. The workplan, milestones, timeline, and budget are appropriate and demonstrate a high likelihood of successful completion.
4. **Impact & Future Growth:** The proposal demonstrates a clear pathway to scientific, societal, policy, or technological impact. It shows strong potential to establish enduring collaborations, attract future external funding, and create opportunities for sustained research beyond the duration of this award.
5. **Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI):** EDI principles are meaningfully integrated into both the composition of the research team and the design and conduct of the research. The proposal

demonstrates how equitable, diverse, and inclusive practices will strengthen the research environment, collaboration, and anticipated outcomes.

Commitments

Funded research teams are expected to:

- Submit a financial report and a project summary report at the end of the funding period.
- Participate in at least one scientific activity organized by Connected Minds and/or IVADO to present research results.
- Acknowledge Connected Minds, IVADO and the CFREF program in all presentations, publications and dissemination activities. Please refer to the IVADO and Connected Minds funding acknowledgement guidelines when referencing support received through this award. Click [here for IVADO guidance](#) and [here for Connected Minds guidance](#).
- Ensure that all research activities comply with applicable ethical standards and requirements. Where applicable, proof of Research Ethics Board (REB) approval (or other required ethics approval) must be provided prior to the release of funds.
- Comply with the Tri-Agency (CIHR, NSERC and SSHRC) Open Access Policy on Publications.
- Adhere to the ICMJE *Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly work in Medical Journals*, to ensure transparency, fairness and accountability.
- Declare any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest related to the proposed project at the full proposal stage.

CONTACT

Should you have any questions regarding this call for proposals, please contact:

Connected Minds: Tara Tharani, ttharani@yorku.ca

IVADO: Audrée Janelle Montcalm, recherche@ivado.ca