

Strategic Project Grants (SPG) – Frequently Asked Questions

Pre-Competition

Q: Why should I apply to the Strategic Project Grants program?

A: Your research combines fundamental and applied aspects, and you're interested in seeing the results from your research reach an application outside of the university.

Q: What is the goal of the Strategic Project Grants program?

A: The goal of the program is to increase research and training in targeted areas that could enhance Canada's economy, society, and/or environment within the next 10 years. The program is expected to foster the increased participation of Canadian-based companies and government organizations in academic research and enable the transfer of knowledge/technology and expertise to these organizations.

Q: Is a Letter of Intent required before applying?

A: No.

Q: Is there an optimal number of researchers to include in an application?

A: An application can be from a single applicant or include co-applicants. The research team must have the necessary expertise to carry out the proposed project. Participants must have a demonstrated role in the project. The average number of investigators on a project is three.

Q: Should more than one institution be represented?

A: Co-applicants can be from different institutions.

Q: How much collaboration is expected between researchers at different universities who are working on separate aspects of a project?

A: The success of a strategic project depends on the appropriateness of skill sets and expertise among researchers in the team. Therefore, the roles and time commitment of each research co-applicant and collaborator should be clearly described in the proposal. In addition, clear collaboration and communication plans should be in place.

Q: Are multiple applications allowed by an applicant or co-applicant?

A: Yes. However, projects should be distinct and stand alone.

Q: Is it possible to talk to someone about my proposed research, fit to target area, eligibility and program requirements?

A: Yes. NSERC staff and your university research grant officer(s) are available to guide you through the process. NSERC staff do not review draft applications, but they can provide advice on how to write a good proposal.

Q: Will being a young researcher affect my chances of success?

A: Being a young researcher should not affect your chances of success. The applicant should clearly describe his/her achievements and contributions in terms of human resources management, administration of funds and research on their Form 100. Young researchers, and researchers new to the university and NSERC systems, are encouraged to bring their innovative ideas forward. The important point is that the team must have the expertise to conduct the project.

Q: What is the difference between a collaborator and a co-applicant?

A: A co-applicant is a member of a research team applying for a group grant (i.e., university or college faculty). You must meet the eligibility criteria (http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/Eligibility-Admissibilite/faculty-corpsprof_eng.asp).

A collaborator does not have access to grant funds. A government scientist, academic researcher, company staff member or research scientist can be a member of a research team that is applying for a group grant. You must be qualified to undertake research independently and will be expected to contribute to the overall intellectual direction of the research project or program of research and bring your own resources to the collaboration.

Q: Can I have collaborators or co-applicants outside the fields of natural sciences and engineering?

A: Yes. Applicants are encouraged to collaborate with experts who work in fields other than the natural sciences and engineering, where appropriate. Academic researchers outside of the natural sciences and engineering may participate in SPG proposals as co-applicants if they meet NSERC's eligibility requirements with respect to type, duration and nature of appointment. Research costs for these collaborations may comprise up to 30 percent of the project costs and must be clearly identified in the project budget. All project expenditures will be subject to NSERC's Use of Grant Funds guidelines.

Statistics

Q: What is the success rate of the SPG program?

A: In 2008, the success rate was 37 percent. In 2009, the success rate was 26 percent: 465 applications were received and 122 grants were awarded.

Q: What is the range of funding per year for Strategic Project Grants?

A: There is no maximum or minimum grant amount. In 2009, the smallest grant awarded was \$60,000 and the largest was \$331,000. The average grant was \$140,000/year for three years.

The amount requested is usually what is awarded. However, the principal investigator must provide justification for the need for funds, and a project may be awarded with a reduced budget.

Q: What is the duration of a Strategic Project Grant?

A: Grants are awarded for projects one to three years in length.

Eligibility

Q: Is it a conflict of interest when a researcher is a principal of a personal start-up company?

A: Yes. A researcher's own consulting company or sole proprietorship is not eligible to collaborate on a project in which the researcher is the applicant or co-applicant.

Q: If a researcher has a term appointment, does it have to cover the period of the grant?

A: To be eligible, your contract must be at least three years, no matter what time you have left in your contract at the time of the application. For example, you would be considered eligible if you had only two months left in your three-year contract at the time of the application. Therefore, it is not necessary for your appointment to cover the period of the grant proposed. However, you must maintain your eligibility for the duration of the grant.

Q: Who should be the principal investigator/applicant?

A: The principal investigator is generally the person who leads the project and devotes the most time to it. The applicant must meet NSERC's eligibility requirements and be from an eligible institution. Refer to the following links: http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/Eligibility-Admissibilite/faculty-corpsprof_eng.asp and http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/Eligibility-Admissibilite/listeligibleinstitutions-listetablissementsadmissible_eng.asp.

Q: Are adjunct professors eligible to apply for Strategic Project Grants?

A: Yes, but only under certain conditions.

If the adjunct position is for *more* than three years, and the primary place of employment *is* academia, then adjunct professors *are* eligible to apply as applicants or co-applicants.

If the adjunct position is for *less* than three years and the primary place of employment *is* academia, adjunct professors *are not* eligible to apply as applicants or co-applicants. They can be collaborators, but will not have access to funds.

If the adjunct position is *more* than three years and the primary place of employment *is not* academia, adjunct professors *are not* eligible as applicants. They can be eligible as co-applicants if the primary place of employment is not a supporting organization.

If the adjunct position is *less* than three years and the primary place of employment *is not* academia, adjunct professors *are not* eligible as applicants or co-applicants.

Adjunct professors outside of academia are normally only awarded funds for student support.

Q: Can researchers working in foreign agencies, universities, national labs or other institutions be included in the proposal?

A: Yes, they can participate as collaborators. As collaborators, they are expected to bring their own resources to the project and will not have access to NSERC funds. The principal investigator may invite visiting scientists to participate in a project, subject to NSERC guidelines (http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Professors-Professeurs/FinancialAdminGuide-GuideAdminFinancier/FundsUse-UtilisationSubventions_eng.asp and http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/International-Internationale/ProfFAQ-ProfFAQ_eng.asp).

Proposal

Q: Do I have to follow the page breakdown indicated in the PowerPoint presentation for my proposal?

A: These are suggested lengths. However, the proposal must *not* exceed 11 pages, including figures and tables. References must be limited to one page. Please read the instructions, and be sure to include the requested information in each section.

Q: Can I submit additional material with my application?

A: Check with a program officer before sending additional material (strgr@nserc-crsng.gc.ca).

Q: Regarding Status reports, is the two-page limit for each NSERC project grant currently held, or for all of the NSERC project grants currently held?

A: Status reports need to be included for previously funded NSERC projects for which the current application is a sequel, or follow-up, to those previous projects. The two-page limit applies to each project. The reports should be brief and should measure the progress made versus the project milestones.

Q: Can an applicant submit a SSHRC or CIHR personal data form with a grant application?

A: Yes. This form is included as "other documents."

Q: Are CVs mandatory for collaborators?

A: If their level of involvement in the project is similar to that of a co-applicant, it is strongly recommended that they submit their Form 100 or CV (five pages maximum).

Q: Does the university need to get a copy of the Form 183A? Is a handwritten form acceptable? Do I have to reveal profit figures?

A: The university does not need a copy of the form, it can be sent directly to NSERC. A handwritten form is acceptable. Please note that, for a successful on-line submission, a Form 183A must be submitted with the on-line application. If there is information you do not want to reveal, please contact a program officer (strgr@nserc-crsng.gc.ca) before submitting your form.

Q: How do we organize the salary of one student working on different sub-projects?

A: You need to split the salary into separate budget pages according to the time spent on each project.

Q: Do I need to include separate budget pages for different sub-projects?

A: Yes, if it is a large project with distinct themes.

Q: How many pages are allowed for budget justification?

A: There is no limit. The important thing is to provide as much detail as possible, and show how you arrived at the totals presented (i.e., show your calculations).

Q: Do we need signatures for on-line submissions?

A: No, our on-line system takes this into account with user ID/password based signatures. However, we expect one copy of the grant application, bearing the original signatures of the applicant and co-applicant(s), as well as of the department head and president of the institution (or their representatives), to be kept at the institution and made available to NSERC upon request. Refer to <http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/OnlineServices-ServicesEnLigne/instructions/101/e.asp?prog=spg>.

Q: What type of experts should I include in Appendix C?

A: Experts in your field of research (also include government/industry-based experts). These experts can be Canadian or international. Please ensure you do not include individuals with whom you collaborate or have collaborated with in the past six years, or individuals who collaborate with any of your supporting organizations. Refer to the instructions for what constitutes a Conflict of Interest (<http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/OnlineServices-ServicesEnLigne/instructions/101/e.asp?prog=spg>).

Evaluation

Q: How are external reviewers chosen?

A: The external reviewers are respected scientists or engineers knowledgeable in the area of the proposal. Reviewers can come from government, industry or academia, and can be international. The program officer has several sources for identifying appropriate reviewers including: 1) suggestions by the applicant (Appendix C); 2) suggestions by the selection panel members; 3) NSERC database. External reviewers use the same evaluation criteria as panel members.

Q: If a project clearly overlaps two target areas, how does it get reviewed?

A: Researchers are strongly encouraged to select one target area. NSERC can proceed with a cross-assignment between panels, if necessary.

Q: What if my project topic falls outside of the research topic?

A: Applications outside the target areas will not be accepted. Applications that fit the context of the target area (but are outside its research topics) are termed “exceptional opportunities.” A maximum of 20 percent of the target area budget is allocated for this purpose. Please note that the onus is on the applicant to make a convincing case for consideration as an “Exceptional Opportunity.”

Q: What is the relative weight of the selection criteria?

A: Each of the seven evaluation criteria are weighted equally.

Q: How are the “Benefits to Canada” evaluated?

A: The selection panel and reviewers will look for: a) socio/economic/health benefits to Canada (quantitative data can be convincing); b) potential benefit in creating significant public policy as a result of the research; c) the potential to increase the number and/or quality of personnel working in an area of strategic importance.

Q: When are the results of the competition announced?

A: The selection panels meet in September to review the applications. The results of the competition are announced, in writing, in October, and funds are released shortly afterwards. Regardless of the outcome, each applicant will receive a “Message to Applicant” which contains the consensus comments of the selection panel and any external referee reports.

Supporting Organizations

Q: What is NSERC’s definition of a supporting organization?

A: Supporting organizations include non-governmental organizations, industries or industry consortia, provincial utilities, and government agencies/departments. The general guidelines that apply to all Research Partnerships Programs can be found at http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/policies-politiques/orgpartners-orgpartenaires_eng.asp.

Q: Are hospitals eligible as supporting organizations? What about crown corporations?

A: Hospitals and clinics are not eligible as supporting organizations. They may participate in a project, but there must be an additional eligible supporting organization participating in the project.

Crown corporations are eligible if they derive their income from sales of goods and services, and they have the capability to exploit the research results.

Q: What are the requirements for supporting organizations participating in the Strategic Project Grants program?

A: The supporting organization must have the ability to exploit the results for the benefit of Canada, must collaborate in all stages of the research project and must validate the results of the research or provide guidance concerning the exploitation of the results. Although cash contributions are not required, in-kind contributions to the direct cost of research is a requirement of supporting organizations participating in the project. Each project must have at least one supporting organization that is either:

- 1) a Canadian-based company (or multi-national organization with manufacturing or research facilities in Canada) that can apply the research results in a way that generates wealth or employment;
- 2) a government organization that can apply the results in a way that strengthens public policy. Please note that it is important that their regulatory role or similar mandate makes them the primary end user of the research (i.e., if it is simply a bench-to-bench collaboration between government and university researchers which is not expected to result in policy changes/improvements, then this would not be an acceptable partnership).

The partner must be appropriate for the project. For example, for research aimed at informing policy debate in Government, appropriate Government departments are eligible partners. For research aimed at Benefit to Canada delivered by the marketplace, an industrial (e.g., for profit) organization is typically required.

Q: What is the difference between a supporting organization and a participating organization?

A: A supporting organization must meet the eligibility requirements and complete a Form 183A (http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/Politiques-Politiques/orgpartners-orgpartenaires_eng.asp). A supporting organization is actively involved in all stages of the research project, including the development of the proposal, ongoing interaction with the academic researchers on the results and direction of the project, and guidance relating to the exploitation and/or commercialization of the results.

A participating organization is any other organization participating in the research.

Q: Are key staff from the supporting organization considered as collaborators?

A: A key staff member from the supporting organization can be listed as a company contact. If there are several staff members, they can be mentioned in the body of the proposal in reference to the specific tasks for which they will be responsible. Alternatively, if there is company personnel that will be as closely linked to the project as your co-applicants (i.e., members of the research team eligible to hold NSERC grants), then you may want to add them as collaborators and include their CVs.

Q: In a project involving several partners, their level of involvement may be different. Is this acceptable?

A: Yes. Their involvement in the project should be well described in the proposal and in the letter of support.

Q: Must all supporting organizations contributing in-kind support submit a Form 183A?

A: Yes. Any supporting organization involved with your project and providing cash or in-kind support to the direct cost of research should submit a Form 183A. Details of their contributions should also be outlined in any letter of support. We will ask for their comments on the progress report and final reports.

Q: Does NSERC require the original copy of the letter of support?

A: As long as the copy of the letter provided to NSERC is signed and on company letterhead, NSERC does not need to receive the original copy. NSERC will accept a signed copy of the letter in any of the following formats: fax, pdf (Acrobat), or hard copy. Should you wish to send the original letter to NSERC under a separate cover, you may certainly do so. Otherwise, please retain it on file.

Q: Can I submit letters of support from other organizations?

A: Only the eligible organizations that have provided a Form 183A will be considered as supporting organizations. Participating organizations may submit letters of support and a Form 183A if they are providing direct support to the project. Letters of interest or general support are not meaningful in the evaluation.

General

Q: What are the reporting requirements for Strategic Project Grants?

A: A progress report must be submitted 18 months after the project start date. The grantee will have to describe progress to date and update the plans for the future conduct of the research and the resources required to complete the approved work. A final report is also required at the end of the grant. Feedback from the supporting organization(s) must also be provided with each report.

Q: What if my project started late?

A: You must submit a progress report at the regular time and explain the delayed start and how this will affect the original work plan.

Q: How often are the target areas revised?

A: Periodically. The current target areas were implemented in 2006.

Q: Are project management costs eligible expenses or in-kind contributions?

A: The maximum level of support for all expenditures related to project management is up to 10 percent of the total cash contributions to the project from all sources (NSERC, partners, etc.). Project management expenses provided by partners will be recognized as an eligible in-kind contribution to the project to a maximum amount of 10 percent of the total cash contributions from all sources. Supportable expenditures and activities include: 1) project manager salary; 2) project management software; 3) project management training for scientific and technical staff working on a project for which project management expenses are requested. Refer to http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Professors-Professeurs/ManagementExpenses-CoutsGestion_eng.asp.

Q: Is a Research Agreement required?

A: NSERC's Policy on Intellectual Property supports the premise that every effort should be made to exploit the results of NSERC-funded research in Canada for the benefit of Canadians. The research of most Strategic Project Grants is at the early stage of the innovation spectrum where there are few issues related to intellectual property. Consequently, a signed research agreement is not usually required. However, if it is anticipated that the proposed research will lead to disclosure of intellectual property, or if a research agreement already exists, then a copy of the research agreement between the supporting organization(s) and the university must be submitted to NSERC and reviewed for conformance to NSERC's Intellectual Property Policy prior to the release of funds. Please note that NSERC's new Intellectual Property Policy was implemented December 1, 2009 (http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/NSERC-CRSNG/policies-politiques/ip-pi_eng.asp).

Q: Are research agreements between individual researchers and supporting organizations accepted?

A: No. The agreement should be between the university and the partner, and include the signature of the principal applicant.

Q: How do you document Ship Time?

A: The need for Ship Time must be documented and the costs entered on the budget pages under "Other."

Q: How long can a PDF be supported?

A: Postdoctoral fellows paid in whole, or in part, from grant funds must receive a total stipend/salary of at least \$25,000 per annum plus non-discretionary benefits. Salaries to postdoctoral fellows are limited to two years' support from NSERC. Three years' support is acceptable, when justified, to attract exceptional foreign candidates. The three-year appointment *must* be offered up front and reported to NSERC with a written justification within one month of an offer being accepted.

Q: I've received a Strategic Project Grant. Can I deviate from my approved budget and training plan?

A: You must adhere to the activities and budget specified in the approved proposal. In particular, you are expected to follow the approved training plan. Prior written authorization from NSERC is required for deviations from the original activities of the research project, deviations from the initial total budget, or any re-allocation of resources of more than 20 percent of an approved budget item.

Q: Can projects be extended?

A: Strategic Project Grants allow for extensions in time only and must be made in writing to the program officer. Extensions are not automatic. Requests must be well justified (i.e., to complete project objectives or

milestones) and must be supported by the supporting organization(s). Extension requests normally occur in the final year of a project.

Q: Who should I contact if I have questions?

A: General inquiries can be directed to strgr@nserc-crsng.gc.ca.

Sector	Strategic Target Area	Contact
Bio-Industries	Biomedical Technologies Quality Foods and Novel Bioproducts	613-992-5606
Environment and Natural Resources	Healthy Environment and Ecosystems Sustainable Energy Systems Safety and Security	613-992-5641
Information, Communications and Manufacturing	Advanced Communications and Management of Information Competitive Manufacturing	613-992-5606
Research Partnerships Programs		613-995-1111

Myths and Misconceptions About the Strategic Project Grants Program

Issue	Myth	Reality
Partnerships	Partner must be industry.	The supporting organization can be any eligible non-academic organization that can use the research results.
Partnerships	Larger companies are better partners than smaller companies.	The supporting organization must be appropriate for the proposal and must have the ability to exploit the research results to generate wealth or employment.
Cash	Partner must contribute cash. It looks better if cash is contributed.	A cash contribution is not required, but some form of partner involvement is required (in-kind). The key point is that the partner is involved in all aspects of the project.
Project vs. Program	A research project and a research program are the same thing.	The SPG program is a project-based program requiring a project objective, plan, milestones and deliverables.
Research Focus	Research is focused on immediate needs of industry.	Strategic Projects focus on emerging research areas and early-stage research. This is not contract research.
Projects are Budget Limited	Projects must be in the \$100,000 to \$200,000 range.	There is no maximum or minimum grant amount. The average grant is \$140,000/yr. In 2009 the smallest grant was \$60,000 and the largest grant was \$331,000.
Student Training	The more students the better. It's the number that matters.	Training of students is an important criterion, but it's the value added by the opportunities for students to interact with the group (in particular, the partner) and gain skills that counts most.
Discipline Thrusts	Play it safe and stick to the NSERC disciplines.	Many of the research thrusts identified in the strategic target areas require a multidisciplinary approach; proposals may even cross the mandates of the other granting agencies.
Benefit to Canada	If it fits the target area descriptions, then it meets the "Benefit to Canada" criteria.	Projects must fit within one of the target areas to be eligible for the program, and applicants must address how the specific project provides the "Benefit to Canada".
Evaluation	Each evaluation criteria is weighted differently.	False. Each criterion is weighted equally.