Tips for Completing your Application
Ontario Early Researcher Awards
Round 18 (2024)

OVERVIEW

The Early Researcher Award (ERA) helps promising, recently appointed researchers in Ontario build their research teams. The program's goal is to improve Ontario's ability to attract and retain the best and brightest research talent. The competition is open to all disciplines.

Funding: Each award provides $100,000 from Ontario for eligible direct costs, matched by $50,000 which is typically provided by Faculties in the form of graduate student support. Ontario provides an additional $40,000 to the institution (specifically, to the host Faculty) for indirect cost support. The funding provided by Ontario is almost exclusively directed toward supporting your research team.

Success Rates: This is a particularly competitive competition. In the previous round (Round 17), York submitted 19 applications and received 1 award. The overall success rate for Round 17 was 17%, with 54 successful applicants. Competitive applicants tend to be more established early career researchers who are in their last years of eligibility.

Eligibility: In the context of the ERA, eligibility is two-fold. Full-time faculty members must have started their **independent academic careers** on or after January 1, 2018, **AND** completed their first **PhD or terminal degree** on or after January 1, 2013. Independent academic careers are defined as the ability to publish, supervise and obtain grant funding independently.

GENERAL ADVICE

- Follow all of the instructions in the Call Guidelines, including formatting, word counts and content in each section. Failure to do so will result in applications being deemed ineligible.
- Use clear, accessible language. The review panel will be multidisciplinary and outside your area of specialization. Avoid jargon or overly technical terms. If you must use them, define them. The application also must be understandable by the Advisory Panel and Minister.
- Begin your outreach to letter writers early and ensure they are sufficiently arms-length as appropriate. **Start this as soon as possible**.
- Demonstrate academic independence and involvement with research with peer-reviewed funding. This is needed to substantiate your research track record (Excellence of the Research) and justify that you have sufficient funding and expertise to lead the research proposed.
- Be specific in the roles and responsibilities of the research team, the objectives and outcomes of the research program, and the benefits to Ontario.
- Get peer feedback on your proposal and look at previously funded awards.
- Make it easy for reviewers by:
  - using headings and subheadings that correspond to the call requirements;
  - leaving white space; and
  - using the active voice as much as possible.

SECTION SPECIFIC ADVICE

- Alignment by Category (section 4), Alignment by Canadian Research and Development Classification Code (section 5), and Key Terms (section 6): The Alignment of Category will help determine which panel reviews your application; chose the most appropriate one. You should assume that the key terms will also be used to further select reviewers within a panel. Be cautious of using a flashy key word that is only minimally part of the proposal, as an expert may seek more details.
- **Lead Institution Contact** (section 7):

  Dr. Mark Roseman
  Director, Strategic and Institutional Research Initiatives
  Office of Research Services
  4700 Keele Street
  Toronto, ON M3J 1P3
  (416)736-2100 ext. 22507
  roseman@yorku.ca

- **Research Summary** (section 8): Keep in mind this will be read prior to any other part of your application – make it accessible and persuasive.
  - Outline your research problem.
  - Explain your solution to the problem and the accomplishments you have achieved that make you well placed to do this.
  - Highlight the importance of this research project to Ontario.
- **Description of the Researcher – First Academic Appointment** (Section 9c): Provide the exact start date of the first independent research appointment. An independent academic research appointment is considered a position where the researcher was capable of independently publishing, supervising and applying for funding.
  - Postdoctoral fellowships are excluded.
  - Contractually limited appointments could be considered independent depending on specific terms of the contract or Department rules. If yours was not, use the space in 9d to explain that it wasn't.
  - Working in the private sector between conferral of degree and academic appointment is an eligible break.
- **Description of the Researcher – Interruptions or Delays** (section 9d): This area should be completed by anyone who needs to justify the extension of eligibility and explain any interruptions or delays. See the Call guidance for details on eligible interruptions. Use this space fully by providing details (exact dates) of your leaves, the nature of the leave and the impact. You can also use this space if you need to qualify a position on the CV as not being fully independent. Please note that the Ministry does count out the days to determine eligibility and it cannot be verified ahead of submission.
- Researcher's Background in Training (Sections 11a-d): This is where you will set the stage for the excellent training environment you provide.
  - Highlight particularly unique and leading-edge aspects of your training (software, equipment, industrial placements, knowledge mobilization, international collaborations, unique access to data or materials, etc.).

- o Demonstrate your experience and success in training. This might include noting the number of trainees, awards they have received, where they are now, joint publications. Note any successful practices that will continue.
  - o Discuss how you've built an inclusive training environment, but do not provide demographic breakdowns of your trainees. Provide the EDI context for your field/team and the specific actions that you take to improve break down any identified barriers.
  - o If you have limited experience as the lead supervisor, make sure you leverage the co-supervision section to speak to how you have contributed to supporting training in collaborative ways. Your informal supervision may provide a boost to your experience.
  - o If you've worked in an environment with limited trainees or without graduate programs, provide those details in Section 11d. No one outside of your Department will know if your program has only just started taking graduate students and there will be expectations that you are training at all levels (undergrad, graduate, and postdoctoral).
- **Training Plans for Research Team** (Section 12): This is where you really need to be specific. Provide the details of how many trainees will work on the project, at what level (undergrad, master's, PhD), what will their jobs be, and how it is linked to the proposed research. You do not need to provide names. Make sure you demonstrate that these are appropriate task for students at that training stage. Again, highlight unique aspects of the training you will offer. Demonstrate how this will make them more competitive in the job market. You will also need to discuss how you incorporate equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) principles into your training. Do not just provide figures on the EDI status of your lab – provide specific examples of how you address EDI in your lab. While internships and placements outside of Ontario are allowed, keep in mind that trainees need to be Ontario based. The training plans should focus on the team funded by this grant but you may extend the conversation to talk about HQP funded outside the grant.
- **Strategic Value to Ontario** (Section 13): When the applications are very competitive in terms of the other criteria, the strategic value to Ontario becomes more important in teasing out the rankings.
  - o Please be specific here. Tell the story of how your research will lead to benefits to people in Ontario and Canada and/or the world. Where possible, tie your research to current policy, frameworks or strategic plans from the Province and/or Federal governments to provide evidence of its relevance.
  - o Be aware of how your area of research affects the population and provide evidence/statistics. How many people live with this condition? Work in the industry? Live in the catchment area of this water basin? Utilize this product? What share of the economy is driven by that industry?
  - o You don't need to try to address everyone aspect of the potential benefits. Focus on one or two areas so you allow yourself space to discuss in detail the potential impact of your project.
  - o Be realistic about the impact and how you will contribute to making that impact happen. Be sure to include your knowledge mobilization plan.
  - o Consider both shorter and longer-term benefits.
  - o If your work is outside of Ontario, you can try to make the case about the ability to enhance the Province's research profile and focus on national benefits.
- **Other Project Requirements** (section 14)

- o **Intellectual Property (IP)** – Discuss how IP is relevant to your project, if applicable. If IP is typically expected in your field, then the reviewers will be looking for details on your IP plans. You need to make plans for ownership of resulting IP and how you will exploit it. Familiarize yourself with Ontario's IP policies (see Guidelines). You should also be aware of the support that Innovation York provides to help researchers secure IP rights and commercialize their inventions. If you have a lot of collaborations outside of the province, the IP section will be closely examined to ensure that you have plans in place for ownership and risk mitigation.
- o **IP Training** – List any IP training the team has had or will soon undertake. This can be internal or external training. The application form provides links, or you can contact Innovation York or the IP Innovation Clinic (ipinnovationclinic@osgoode.yorku.ca).
- o **Youth Outreach** – Each ERA recipient must conduct youth outreach activities. The Youth Outreach Plan is not really adjudicated but strong plans can help distinguish your proposal from others.
  - You must undertake Youth Outreach Activities in EACH year of the program.
  - You may use up to $1,000 toward these activities, although it is not required to do so. Please pay attention to eligible costs in the Guidelines. For example, these funds cannot be used to buy/rent audiovisual equipment, rent space, pay for honoria or develop curriculum.
  - Youth outreach should be aimed at high schoolers or younger.
  - You do not need to create something new. You can describe how you will participate in programs that already exist in your Faculty or Department.
- **Milestones and Deliverables** (section 15) – This section sets out the milestones and deliverables you will need to report against should your application be successful. You must list milestones and deliverables for each category: recruitment, training, research and youth outreach. Be realistic in setting out milestones and deliverables. The Ministry will expect you to realize the outputs listed. Consider the recruitment timeline versus the start date of the Award (anticipated to be early Spring 2025) when you set up your milestones.
- **Funding Received by Researcher** (section 16) – You should list up to 20 sources of funding you have received and indicate which funds will support the project that you are proposing in this application. This section is used to demonstrate your research track record and that you have sufficient funding to execute the project. Prioritize funding where you are the PI or named Co-Applicant. You may include both internal and external funding awards.
- **Government Awards Received by Researcher** (section 19) – These are questions to help ensure eligibility. Previous ERA winners or Tier 1 CRCs are not eligible.
- **Reference letters** (section 18) – Reference letters carry a lot of weight in the assessment of ERA applications. These letters provide field relevant expertise to the panel members reviewing your file.
  - o Three letters are required: One from someone who is associated with the applicant, such as a previous supervisor or collaborator. Two must be from arms-length experts in the field.
  - o Letters must speak to all 4 selection criteria. Therefore, letter writers need to have knowledge of your research and access to your application materials to help them speak to the Quality of the Researcher, Quality of the Proposed Research, Training Development and Benefits to Ontario.

- When selecting letter writers, keep in mind:
  - None should be from York University.
  - One arms-length letter writer should be of international stature, meaning they are from outside of Canada and/or recognized as a global leader in the field.
  - A strong letter of reference should be able to speak in detail about your research. While a very senior person with a global reputation would be ideal, if they do not have real knowledge of your research, the letter will not carry sufficient weight. Opt for letter writers who you predict will be strongly supportive of your research and enthusiastic. The Research Officers and SIRI will be looking for lackluster letters and advise if one should be dropped.
  - Letters can come from industry or other non-academics as long as they are considered experts in the field.
- Use the bios provided to demonstrate the letter writers' expertise and international stature. Describe why you selected them – what particular aspect of your work can they speak to?
- We recommend that you consider soliciting an extra letter just in case someone is unable to meet the competition deadlines. It happens very often.
- Do no allow letter writers to recycle old letters. They must address the ERA selection criteria and the must be dated within the last 6 months.
- Letters must be no more than 2 pages in length and written in Arial 12-point font. They should be submitted on letterhead. Scanned letter or letters with e-signatures are acceptable.
- Letters should be addressed to: Office of Research Service, York University, 5th Floor Kaneff Tower, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON M3J 1P3.
- Researchers should not have access to the letters and letter writers should email their letters directly to siri@yorku.ca. Faculty Research Officers will contact letter writers with instructions.
- **Letters should be received by the SIRI team by July 8, 2024.**
- **Signature (section 22) –** SIRI will arrange for signature by the Authorized Signing Officer once the application is submitted to the Office of Research Services. The Vice President of Research & Innovation is the signatory. Please do not sign yourself. Once signed, the document may not be changed (neither the form nor attached appendices).

APPENDIX A: TOTAL BUDGET EXPENDITURE
- Faculty Research Officers will support you in developing the budget.
- Keep in mind the time needed to recruit in Year 1. Awards are anticipated to start in Spring 2025 so you may not have new recruits in place until the middle of year 1.
- The Total Direct Costs should equal $150,000 and include the matching funds component assigned to the related expense (i.e., if it is a York Graduate Fellowship it should be assigned to salary and benefits).
- Overhead costs should equal $40,000. This is generally 40% of the direct costs per year.
- The institutional matching contribution should be $50,000.
- Total expenditures will include the direct costs + indirects for a total of $190,000.
- Please review the eligible costs in the Guidelines.
- Provide details of calculations and why the items are necessary in the budget justification.
- The budget can only cover open access fees for papers where students are co-authors.

APPENDIX B – PROPOSED RESEARCH PROPOSAL

- Following the formatting guidelines:
    - Arial 12-point font
    - Single space
    - One-inch margins
    - Number pages
    - 6 pages max, including appendices but excluding references
- While there is no specific required format, follow the guidelines and consider the following outline:
    - Background/Context
    - Aims and objectives
    - Literature review/state of the field
    - Research Activities and methods
    - Training activities
    - Knowledge mobilization plans
    - Anticipate Results and Impact
- Do not recycle old proposals. Be sure that you have rewritten the proposal to align with the requirements for the ERA project. The reviewers can tell when you have copied and pasted your Discovery Grant.
- The proposed research needs to have funding from another source, so it does not (and should not) be a completely new area of research for you. You will need to demonstrate your ability to carry out the research based on your independent track record and that it is feasible based on the funding you have. The proposed program needs to be related to a grant you already hold.
- Keep in mind this is a project-based grant – not program based.

APPENDIX C – RESEARCH PRODUCTIVITY AND RECOGNITION

- Following the formatting guidelines:
    - Arial 12-point font
    - Single space
    - One-inch margins
    - Number pages
    - Use reverse chronological order when listing items
    - See Guidelines for more details
    - There are no page limits but avoid the appearance of padding the CV with non-relevant entries.
- Follow the order of sections as required in the Guidelines.
- Highlight where you have published with students – indicate students with an asterisk in each contribution entry.
- Consider including trainee awards in the supervision section.
- You may add additional sections if needed but ensure the required sections are there.

MITIGATING ECONOMIC AND GEOPOLITICAL RISK CHECKLIST AND ATTESTATION FORM (ATTACHMENTS)

- Please complete the internal Notice of Intent (NOI). The details provided in that form will help flag any risks that may need a further risk mitigation plan. Innovation York will review the NOI and reach out with support as needed. You can also reach out ahead of time(to Rebecca Irwin, Rirwin1@yorku.ca. Please check details on the NOI form.

- You must complete the Mitigating Economic and Geopolitical Risk Checklist. Use this link to access the most up to date form: https://forms.mgcs.gov.on.ca/en/dataset/on00352.
- An attestation form will also be required but it is still in development. Please follow up with your Research Officer for the latest information prior to submission.
- The SIRI team will arrange signatures on this form.
- If you respond to anything on the form as "No" or "not applicable", you can use the free text box to provide an explanation.

TIMELINES

Date	Tasks
Monday, June 17, 2024	Faculties submit Internal Notice of Intent for ERA applicants to siri@yorku.ca.
Monday, July 8, 2024	The reference letters must be received by SIRI (siri@yorku.ca). **Nominees must not be cc'ed nor have access to letters.**
Monday, July 15, 2024	**Completed applications due to SIRI (siri@yorku.ca):** 1) ERA application form (with attachments) 2) Completed Mitigating Risk Checklist and Attestation Form 3) Faculty memo confirming matched funds and source of funds 4) Signed ORS Checklist
Thursday, July 25, 2024 @5pm	**Deadline for ORS to submit applications to the Ministry**