CFI 2027 Innovation Fund (IF2027) RTA Instructions

The purpose of this document is to guide researchers as they complete the online CFI 2027 Innovation Fund (IF2027) Request to Apply (RTA) form. The document is a tool to be used to ensure that all of the necessary information is available for the various units that will review and approve the RTA.

If you have questions regarding the RTA process, please contact Research Administrative Services, Institutional Programs (RAS-IP) at rsoinnov@ualberta.ca.

Message from the Office of the Vice-President, Research

The Office of the VPR strongly encourages the creation of shared research spaces, the use of communal equipment, and the adoption of core facilities whenever possible. Applications to the CFI IF2027 competition should seek to establish shared research resources or add new capabilities to existing core facilities. Such applications will be given higher priority in adjudication decisions involving the Office of the VPR over applications involving single-users or those with limited potential for shared use.

I. CFI Innovation Fund (IF) Program Information

The IF provides continued investments in infrastructure, across the full spectrum of research, from the most fundamental to applied through to technology development. Projects funded through the IF will help Canada remain at the forefront of exploration and knowledge generation while making meaningful contributions to generating social, health, environmental and economic benefits and addressing global challenges.

Total project costs must be greater than $1 million for proposals to be considered for this competition.

II. IF2027 RTA Process

At the time the RTA form opened, no information was available from the CFI regarding the IF2027 competition; however, given that the CFI announced that IF competitions will run every two years, the next IF deadline is expected to fall somewhere in early 2027. The RTA form has been opened well before detailed information about the IF2027 competition is available. This was deliberate so that Colleges and Faculties can spend time developing ideas for projects and bringing project teams together. Once more information is known about the IF2027 competition, RAS-IP will communicate next steps in the internal review and approval process.

IMPORTANT: There are two RTA forms open, one for UofA-led projects and one for externally-led projects. Ensure you complete the correct form.
1. **For UofA-led projects:**
   a. The CFI IF2027 RTA form for UofA-led projects is available here.
   b. A PDF of the RTA form is available here (this is for reference only; do <u>not</u> submit the RTA as a PDF).
   c. The RTA form and additional information are also available on our website here.

2. **For externally-led projects (where the project is led by another institution but UofA is anticipated as a collaborator):**
    a. The CFI IF2027 RTA form for externally-led projects is available here.
    b. A PDF of the RTA form is available here (this is for reference only; do not submit the RTA as a PDF).
    c. The RTA form and additional information are also available on our website here.

During RTA and application development, applicants are strongly encouraged to consult and review the following documents and resources:

● CFI Policy and program guide: Provides information about the CFI funding structure, eligibility of costs and matching funding, in-kind contributions, etc.

● 2025 IF Call for proposals: The latest IF guidelines available; there may be changes in the 2027 competition, but the 2025 document provides a basic overview of the criteria that must be addressed in the Notice of Intent and the full application.

● 2025 IF Expert Committee meeting (webinar): Intended for Expert Committee reviewers, but provides a good overview of the IF review process and what reviewers will be looking for in proposals. The 2025 IF Expert Committee guidelines and 2025 IF Multidisciplinary Assessment Committee guidelines are also available.

● CFI IF Proposal Development Strategy Guide: Developed by the Office of the VPR and RAS, this document is a comprehensive guide to addressing IF assessment criteria.

III. RTA Development

Some notes about the RTA form:

● **Saving your progress:** When the RTA form is completed, please click the 'Submit' button. If you have only partly completed the form and wish to continue entering responses later, make sure to go to the end of the form and click the 'Submit' button. This will save the responses you have already entered. The form is set up to allow you to return to the form to edit responses after submission. Save the link so that you can return to edit the form as needed before the deadline.

● **Uploading Documents:** Please note that uploaded documents cannot be removed or changed once they are uploaded (this is a quirk of Google Forms). If a file has been uploaded in error, or if a new version has been uploaded, please leave a comment at the end of the form to indicate which version should be used.

● **Lead Institution:** Complete the correct form based on whether the project is being led by the UofA or by a different institution, as per Section II of this document.

● **Response Copies**: A copy of the form responses will be sent to the e-mail address of the individual that submitted the form.

Refer to the following information frequently when preparing the RTA form.

1. General Information

This section collects basic information about the project. For UofA-led projects, more information will be required. For externally-led projects, it is understood that the UofA Principal Investigator (PI) and/or project team may not have complete information about the project at the RTA stage. It is therefore requested that the respondent complete as many of the responses as possible.

Project Leaders/Team Leaders: Since the CFI allows up to two co-leaders to be listed for an IF project, you may indicate one or two Team Leaders. However, the Team Leader that will be the main contact for administrative communications and who will be responsible for completing project-related information online through the CFI Awards Management System (CAMS) will be designated the Administrative Lead.

Collaborating Institutions: A collaborating institution is one that A) receives part of the infrastructure or B) uses part of its institutional envelope in a multi-institutional project. As many collaborating institutions as is necessary can be listed, but they must meet at least one of these requirements. The project leader is encouraged to reach out to the lead PI at each collaborating institution early in the project development process to ensure that the collaborating institution(s) can contribute a portion of their institutional envelope to the project (as applicable).

For external-led projects, the amount of envelope the UofA will contribute to the project is based on different scenarios:

a) If the UofA will be assembling and/or housing infrastructure as part of the project, the UofA envelope contribution will almost always be 40% of the total eligible cost of infrastructure coming to the UofA. The envelope amount should be confirmed with the lead institution.

b) If the UofA will not be assembling or housing infrastructure as part of the project, no budget will be required for the UofA portion. The respective institutional envelope contributions will be determined by the lead and collaborating institutions and will be communicated to each institution once decided.

Core Facilities: The form will ask if the project is for the creation, renewal, or upgrade of a core facility as defined by the CFI.
- The CFI defines a core facility as a formally recognized and institutionally supported entity that provides researchers with access to state-of-the-art research services, instruments, technology, expertise, and/or training regardless of their administrative affiliation and with no requirement for collaboration or co-authorship. It offers resources that are typically too expensive, complex, or specialized for individual researchers to acquire and sustain, and it operates with a clearly defined governance structure and its own dedicated management that oversees all aspects of the facility. See page 8 of the 2025 IF Call for Proposals for more details on what is considered a core facility.
- **If the project is for a core facility, some sections will request additional and/or specific information. Ensure this information is included in all uploaded documents and/or written sections of the RTA.**

2. Letter of Support from Faculty/College

Each project, whether UofA- or external-led, must submit <u>one</u> Letter of Support with the RTA. Faculties and Colleges are <u>required</u> to use the [Letter of Support Template for IF2027 UofA RTA](#) to prepare letters for researchers.

Instructions
1) For researchers: To initiate the preparation of a Letter of Support for your RTA, contact your Faculty IF2027 Unit Representative [as listed here](#) and indicate your interest in submitting an RTA for this competition. Once you have the final signed copy of the letter, upload it in the appropriate section of the RTA Form.
2) For Faculties/Colleges/Standalone Faculties: The IF2027 Unit Representatives, [listed here](#), are responsible for coordinating the preparation of the Letter of Support, including obtaining all required signatures.
3) To use the Letter of Support Template:
   a) To get an editable copy of the Letter of Support Template, download (Word Doc or PDF) a copy from the provided link or navigate to File>Make a copy to create an editable Google Doc. The template can also be copy-pasted into your own file. Proceed with your preferred format for editing and preparing the letter.
   b) Customize the green sections of the letter.
   c) Once complete, remove all green from the letter (including the header and footer) and acquire all required signatures.
   d) Provide a PDF of the letter to the researcher for upload to the RTA form.

Letter Content
As per the template, the letter must include:
A. Confirmation that all participating Faculties and Colleges support the proposed project. Faculties and Colleges must confirm that they have reviewed the proposal and that it is appropriate and competitive for the IF competition.
B. The specific amount of IF envelope being requested for the project.
C. Confirmation of any additional financial support to be provided by Departments, Faculties, Colleges, or the UofA.
D. Confirmation of the space allocated to house the requested infrastructure.

Required Signatures
Accordingly, the letter must be signed by:
1. The Associate/Vice Dean, Research of *each* participating Faculty.
2. The Associate/Vice Dean, Research of the Project Leader's College *only*.
3. All designated Space Planners, as applicable for confirmation of all equipment housing spaces listed.
4. Additional signatories as applicable to confirm listed financial support (e.g., Department Chairs, Faculty Deans, etc.)

3. Strategic Alignment (1-2 paragraphs)

The project team must demonstrate that the proposed research and outcomes align with institutional and provincial objectives and priorities. Institutional priorities may be at the institutional, College, Faculty, or departmental level and researchers are encouraged to address alignment at all levels.

For institutional research priorities, refer to the UofA Strategic Plan for Research and Innovation. For provincial research and commercialization priorities, refer to the Alberta Technology and Innovation Strategy.

4. Research Plan (maximum length: 3 pages, 12-point font)

The Research Plan should clearly present the merits and excellence of the proposed project. Sufficient information should be provided to enable reviewers to evaluate the proposal in accordance with the CFI program requirements. Focus should be placed on the following three points:

- **Innovation**: How does the research present a new way of approaching a topic to overcome problems others have faced previously?
- **Feasibility**: Demonstrate that the research can be accomplished in a reasonable time with the infrastructure requested and the assembled project team.
- **International Context**: How is the project innovative in comparison to similar research being done around the world - locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally?
- **For core facilities,** describe how the facility enables researchers to conduct research or technology development that is innovative, feasible and internationally competitive.
  - Provide a high-level description of the types of projects the infrastructure will enable, and, in more detail, a representative sample of the projects to be conducted. If possible, include a link to the facility's website.
  - Describe the innovative aspects and the breakthrough potential of the projects within the national and international context, including references.
  - Describe the network of users and collaborators in academia, communities, public or private sector.
  - Describe how principles of equity, diversity and inclusion have been considered in the design of the projects. If not applicable, explain why.

For resubmissions of previously unsuccessful projects, applicants must upload a document (max. 3 pages, 12-point font) discussing their plans to address and mitigate the reviewers' concerns about the previous project.

5. Research Team (maximum length: 1 page, 12-point font)

IF projects may list up to ten (10) team members. For each team member, summarize the expertise and experience they possess to conduct and ensure the success of the proposed research program. Note that CVs for each team member will be attached to the full proposal, so discussion in the text should be specific to the research project described.

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For core facilities, describe how the team has all the experience and expertise needed to enable multiple research or technology development activities and will do so in an inclusive and equitable working environment.

- Describe how the team has the expertise and specialized skills needed to enable multiple research or technology development activities and use the requested infrastructure.
- Describe the experience and output of each team member as it relates to their career stage and role in the team.
- Describe evidence-based actions taken to enable full participation of individuals from underrepresented groups and early-career researchers.
- Describe evidence-based actions taken to provide an equitable, inclusive and accessible working environment.

6. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) [1-2 paragraphs]

The CFI is increasingly requesting information about how principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion are considered with respect to team composition and the research project. A description of systemic barriers specific to the field of research and ways of ensuring an inclusive and collaborative research environment should be discussed. The following resources may help in developing this section:

- UofA EDI Framework for Research Excellence
- UofA EDI in Research: An Action Plan
- UofA EDI in Research Web Page
- Best Practices in Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Research

7. Benefits (maximum length: 1 page, 12-point font)

Discuss the social, economic, health, and/or environmental benefits of the research for all potential end users (academics, clinicians, industry, policy makers, public, etc.). Emphasize benefits to Highly Qualified Personnel (HQP), including students, fellows, and professionals using the infrastructure. Include proposed plans for:

- Knowledge mobilization (traditional and non-traditional research outputs - refer to p. 18 of the 2025 IF Call for proposals for definitions).
- Technology transfer (if there may be an opportunity for commercialization of the results). See the UofA web page on Commercializing Your Research for available resources.

For core facilities, describe the team and their partners' plan to transfer research or technology development results and mobilize knowledge. Also, describe how the results are likely to lead to benefits for Canadians.

- Describe the anticipated benefits of the activities enabled by the facility and their impact.
- Describe potential pathways to transfer results to end users and partners (e.g., collaboration with communities, clinicians and the public or private sector).
- Describe how principles of equity and inclusion for any people or communities that may be impacted by the proposed activities have been considered.
- Describe the training of highly qualified personnel.
- Describe how diversity and equity have been integrated in the training and mentorship programs.

8. Infrastructure Justification (maximum length: 3 pages, 12-point font)

Provide details about the requested infrastructure - what is it, what does it do, and why is it needed? Discuss why the infrastructure is necessary and appropriate to conduct the proposed research program and how it builds upon existing capacity.

- Discuss related items under suites. For example, a microscopy suite including a confocal microscope, vibration-free table, and computer workstation can be considered one suite.

- Describe each item and why it is needed. Using the example above, each of the items within the microscopy suite should be described and their need for the research justified.

- **For core facilities**, discuss how the requested infrastructure will either form a core facility or be incorporated into an existing core facility. Describe how the requested infrastructure is necessary, appropriate and will enhance the facility's services.
    - Describe each requested item and a justification of its need. Although not required for the RTA, the application will require a table matching infrastructure to proposed activities and methodologies.
    - Describe how the requested infrastructure integrates with the existing infrastructure and fits within the mission of the facility.
    - Describe the role in operating, maintaining or managing the facility of any personnel for whom funding is being requested.

- If the same or similar equipment exists locally, include a justification for why you require dedicated equipment. For larger, more complex equipment that exists regionally or nationally, explain why it can't be used for the research.

NOTE: Information about current multi-user facilities at the UofA can be found here.

NOTE: The CFI has partnered with Laboratories Canada to promote collaboration between organizations eligible for CFI funding and federal science departments and agencies. The CFI encourages applicants to reach out to their contacts within federal science departments and agencies to discuss their current CFI funding proposals. CFI- funded and federal government research facilities are listed on the CFI's Research Facilities Navigator. More information about this partnership can be found here.

9. Sustainability (maximum length: 2 pages, 12-point font)

The CFI wants to see that the team has a plan for the operation and maintenance (O&M) of the requested infrastructure. Please provide as much of the following information as possible:

- **Project governance and management structures**: This can be presented as text or an org chart, whichever is easier.

- **Institutional supports**: This may include financial (e.g., cash contribution), space (e.g., newly renovated lab for housing equipment), and/or personnel (e.g., covering cost of dedicated technician time for the project).

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- **Costs of O&M**: What will need to be paid for to keep the equipment operational and maintained? More details and tips on developing the O&M budget can be found in the CFI O&M budget reference guide.

- **Revenue sources to cover O&M costs**: Discuss Infrastructure Operating Funds (see below), user fee structure, other funding, etc.

- **For core facilities**, address how the infrastructure will be well managed, accessible and optimally used over its useful life.
  - Describe how the facility will be operated and managed.
  - Describe how the infrastructure will be optimally used (e.g., user access, level of use, plan to maximize usage).
  - Describe evidence-based actions taken to ensure equitable and inclusive access.
  - Describe how data will be securely and ethically managed.
  - Describe the operating and maintenance costs and revenue sources.

The CFI provides support for operation and maintenance (O&M) of CFI-funded infrastructure through the Infrastructure Operating Fund (IOF). This funding is additional to the initial equipment funding request. The amount of funding provided through the IOF is often insufficient to support the full O&M costs of CFI-funded equipment for a given project. The responsibility for covering O&M costs above the amount available through the IOF is a shared responsibility of the project team, Department, Faculty, and institution. More information about IOF and operation and maintenance of CFI-funded infrastructure at the UofA can be found in the UofA O&M Plan.

10. Budget and Quotes

Download and complete the Budget Template for the IF2027 UofA RTA. The budget will be used to help determine the amount of institutional envelope to be contributed to the project and whether or not a cash shortfall will need to be covered.

For as much of the requested equipment as possible, obtain quotes from vendors. Ideally, quotes will include the following information that can be used to complete the budget:
- List price (price before any discounts)
- Academic/educational/other (e.g., normal, regional, etc.) discounts
- CFI in-kind (sometimes also called CFI discount)

You may use the Request for Quotation form if you are working with a vendor that is unfamiliar with the CFI quote format. Quotations obtained will not be submitted to the CFI with the proposal; they are for internal use for budget development only at this stage.

Vendors are NOT REQUIRED to provide any discounts. To be eligible, the vendor must offer the in-kind contributions voluntarily. The CFI has provided a document with further information about in-kind contributions, including a sample of information that can be provided to vendors when requesting these contributions.

Costs should be realistic. If, during proposal review, CFI reviewers determine that an estimated cost for an item is too high or inflated, they may reduce the award amount. Conversely, if the requested amount is too low and the actual cost is higher than the approved budget amount, it will be the responsibility of the PI to cover the shortfall. The CFI will not increase the award amount and may not allow removal of other budget lines to account for a missed or under-estimated cost.

Extended warranties should be included in the RTA budget, except in specific circumstances where it may be more cost-effective to repair the infrastructure on an as-needed basis.

Since this is an early stage in the development of your project, it is understood and anticipated that further development of your budget and equipment list may occur. However, if you are unable to come up with a working list of the equipment you need, it may be that your project is not yet ready to proceed to the full proposal stage.

Also, please note that it may not be possible to make changes to the infrastructure request after RTA approval since a) the envelope contribution and renovation estimate are based on the RTA budget and b) there may not be sufficient time to re-scope the renovations needed to accommodate any new equipment.

11. Research Space and Renovations

At this stage, researchers should not try to estimate potential renovation costs. Rather, we ask that the space proposed to house the equipment is identified, committed, and confirmed (via the Letter of Support), and that clear information about the requested equipment is provided. This will allow the UofA Project Management Office (PMO) to review and estimate the cost of any space modifications that will be required to effectively use the equipment.

A contingency factor of 13% of the total project cost is included in the RTA budget to account for potential renovation costs; do not include a separate renovation line in your RTA budget. The contingency factor is included so that researchers who are approved to move forward to full proposal development have some cushion for renovation costs, if deemed necessary during the application development stage. If renovations are not required after PMO's final assessment, the envelope amount contributed to the project will be reduced accordingly.

For this section, you will need to upload the following documents:

1. **Sketch Layout**: Create a diagram (hand-drawn or computer-generated) showing approximate dimensions of the proposed space combined with an overlay of the requested equipment to demonstrate fit (equipment clearances, dependencies/layout, services connections, etc.).

2. **Equipment Data Table**: Make a copy of and complete the Equipment Data Table Template, ensuring all equipment is listed.

3. **Installation Guides**: For major pieces of equipment, include facility installation guides as applicable.

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If you are concerned that your project may require significant renovations, or if you have any questions about this section, please contact Alex Hatch, Project Administrative Coordinator (alex.hatch@ualberta.ca; 780-668-9707) and/or Peter Gegolick (gegolick@ualberta.ca; 780-887-7389) to discuss. Use "IF2027 RTA {Insert Lead PI Last Name}" in the subject line.

12. Supplemental Information

The RTA will be reviewed by various UofA Central Administrative Units (CAUs) to assess the project from the perspective of their area of expertise and to identify potential issues that could hinder the success of a project.

Based on the CAUs reviews of the responses to these questions, the Project Leader may be asked to provide further information in order for the reviewer to determine if there are additional concerns that need to be addressed. If this is the case, RAS-IP will put the Project Leader in touch with the reviewer so that the reviewer's concerns can be discussed in more detail.

Some questions in this section may not be applicable to the research project. However, a Data Management Plan and a Technology Transfer Plan are expected to be presented in the full application and it is highly encouraged that researchers begin planning these now. As such, all applicants should provide a response to these two questions in the RTA form.

13. Final Submission of the RTA Form

When you have finished entering responses in the RTA form:
1. Verify that all sections and questions as applicable have been answered. Missing information will delay RTA review.
2. Provide an estimated timeline for the project based on all the information provided. This will be used to assess whether the project
3. Complete the submission checklist to ensure that you have completed all appropriate sections and have uploaded the required documents.
4. If you have any comments about the form, including to clarify which version of an uploaded document to use, please use the Comments section.

If you have questions regarding the RTA process, please contact Research Administrative Services, Institutional Programs at rsoinnov@ualberta.ca.