Competition: WINTER 2020
Version: 5.0
Date: October 30, 2019

1.0 Overview of BrainsCAN

Western University's BrainsCAN initiative received a $66 million investment from Government of Canada's Canada First Research Excellence Fund (CFREF), providing a significant boost to ongoing research in cognitive neuroscience and imaging. These funds enable researchers at Western University, along with their national and international academic and commercial partners, to conduct cognitive neuroscience research, to seek answers to fundamental questions regarding how we learn, think, move and communicate. The CFREF program aims to help Canadian postsecondary institutions excel globally in research areas that create long-term economic advantages for Canada. BrainsCAN was competitively selected for funding through this program for seven years starting in September 2016. The BrainsCAN initiative will accelerate Canada's ability to deliver effective solutions to the challenge of maintaining optimal brain function across the lifespan.

2.0 Postdoctoral Scholar Program Philosophy and Structure

Training the next generation of researchers is a key aim of the BrainsCAN initiative, and postdoctoral researchers are the engines of innovative research. The BrainsCAN Postdoctoral Fellowship program has been developed to attract the world's most promising early-career neuroscientists and neuroimagers to Canada, and to Western. The program supports postdoctoral researchers in cognitive neuroscience at both junior (Tier II) and senior (Tier I) postdoctoral stages. Tier II fellows will generally have completed their PhD no more than two years before they apply, and Tier I fellows will generally have 2-6 years of postdoctoral experience; however, exceptions will be considered. This program also recognizes exceptional postdoctoral fellows already at Western who are conducting BrainsCAN relevant research and who have received external postdoctoral funding. BrainsCAN will top-up external salary to Tier II or I levels (depending on candidate's level) and will also provide the other benefits such as the research/travel allowance enjoyed by other BrainsCAN Postdoctoral Fellows.

2.1 Program Targets

In the Winter 2020 competition, this program aims to fund **up to 10** Tier II scholars and Tier I scholars; however, the actual number of funded scholars will be determined by the excellence of the candidates.

2.1.1 BrainsCAN Computational Fellowship Stream

Funds have been secured from the BrainsCAN Computational core to support PDFs that meet the mandate described at Computational Core website. Those wishing to be considered under the Computational Stream will have the opportunity to indicate that on their application. Please note these applications will still also be

reviewed under the general BrainsCAN Fellowship Program and can be funded under either stream.

2.2 <u>Important Dates</u>

- Application deadline: **Feb 1, 2020**
- Expected spring results: **Apr 2020**
- **Date by which PDF must commence: Feb 1, 2021**

3.0 Funding Level and Term Length

3.1 <u>Postdoctoral Fellowship Tier II</u>

Tier II Researchers will receive $55,000/year (plus benefits) for 2 years (potentially renewable for a 3rd year) and a Research/Travel Stipend of $3,000/year. Applicants are strongly encouraged to apply for external funding, and salary will be higher if the applicant has received an external postdoctoral fellowship (see Section 9.4 for more details). Benefits include Employment Insurance, Canada Pension Plan, a health care spending account (to cover eye and dental care, prescriptions, etc.), and parental leave. See Section 4.1 for Tier II eligibility. Note that the CFREF BrainsCAN funding ends in Summer 2023, and thus all fellowships must be finished by that time.

3.2 <u>Postdoctoral Fellowship Tier I</u>

Tier I Researchers will receive $70,000/year (plus benefits) for 3 years (potentially renewable for a 4th and 5th year) and a Research/Travel Stipend of $5,000/year. Applicants are strongly encouraged to apply for external funding, and salary will be higher if the applicant has received an external postdoctoral fellowship (see Section 9.4 for more details). Tier I applicants will be able to apply for funding to the $12M BrainsCAN Accelerator internal operating grant program. Other benefits include Employment Insurance, Canada Pension Plan, a health care spending account (to cover eye and dental care, prescriptions, etc), and parental leave. See Section 4.2 for Tier I eligibility. Note that the CFREF BrainsCAN funding ends in Summer 2023, and thus all fellowships must be finished by that time.

3.3 <u>Statutory Benefits</u>

As an employer in Ontario, Western University, together with its employees, must contribute to certain programs which are set out by federal or provincial statute. This includes the <u>Canada Pension Plan</u> which provides a minimum level of pension payments on retirement to all Canadian workers; <u>Employment Insurance</u> which provides benefits when a Canadian worker is not able to fully participate in the workforce; the <u>Ontario Health Insurance Plan</u>, which provides Ontario residents access to physicians, hospital and other health services; and the <u>Workplace Safety and Insurance Board</u> program, which provides workers in Ontario who

are injured while on the job a stream of benefits and supports while they are unable to work due to the injury.

4.0 Applicant Eligibility

4.1 <u>Western University Postdoctoral Scholar</u>

The Western University Policies on Postdoctoral Scholars can be found at https://grad.uwo.ca/postdoctoral_services/index.html. These include criteria that the appointment is time-limited, for a period of up to four years with the possibility of a one-year renewal (for a maximum of five years), is viewed as preparatory for a full-time academic or research career, and is under the supervision of a faculty mentor and often as part of a larger research team.

4.2 <u>Tier II Eligibility</u>

Applicants of any nationality, coming from an institution anywhere in the world, are welcome to apply. They will typically have defended their PhD no more than two years earlier, but exceptions will be considered. By the application deadline date, applicants already at Western will have been at Western for no more than 6 months (including doctoral research) by the application deadline. In the application form, candidates are encouraged to describe any conditions (e.g., illness; parental, caretaking or bereavement leave, or environmental factors) that have had an effect on performance or productivity.

4.3 <u>Tier I Eligibility</u>

Applicants of any nationality, coming from an institution anywhere in the world, are welcome to apply. Tier I applicants are normally expected to have at least 2 years of relevant experience (academic or industry) following completion of their doctoral degree, however exceptional candidates with less experience will be considered. In the application form, candidates are encouraged to describe any conditions (e.g., illness; parental, caretaking or bereavement leave, or environmental factors) that have had an effect on performance or productivity. Applicants who are more than 6 years post-PhD will be asked to justify in the application form why further training (via this program) is valuable.

4.4 <u>Externally Funded Postdoctoral Follows</u>

Postdoctoral Fellows at Western engaged in BrainsCAN-aligned research and who receive external postdoctoral funding may, through application to the BrainsCAN Postdoctoral Scholars Program, be converted to a BrainsCAN Postdoctoral Scholar Tier II (or Tier I) status for the duration of their external award (i.e., their salary will be supplemented, and they will receive the same research/travel stipend and benefits as other BrainsCAN Postdoctoral Fellow at their level). Please see Section 9.4 below for the application procedure for Postdoctoral scholars holding a Tri-Council postdoctoral fellowship, or other external funding equivalent to $40,000

CAD/year or more. This applies even if applicants were not successful in a previous BrainsCAN Postdoctoral Fellowship competition.

For further Western University Polices on Postdoctoral Scholars please consult http://www.grad.uwo.ca/postdoctoral_scholars/.

5.0 Research Proposal Eligibility

The research proposal must be relevant to the aims of BrainsCAN as elaborated in the BrainsCAN Research Alignment/Steering Document. The innovative nature of the proposal will be evaluated and candidates are <u>required</u> to propose projects that will link two or more labs (and advisors).

6.0 Proposed Advisor(s) Guidelines

- Working with multiple advisors across multiple labs is required. At least one named advisor must hold an eligible academic appointment (full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty at the Assistant, Associate, or Full Professor level) with a significant research component at Western University. Each advisor must provide *a Biosketch in the NIH format* https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biosketch.htm.

- ***A (single) letter of support should be submitted and signed jointly by all Advisors.*** The letter of support (LOS) should detail the space, facilities and personnel support available to the applicant, justify the novelty and innovative nature of the project, as well as include a statement of commitment to the professional development of the applicant. Also, the LOS should describe how Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) principles are embedded in their research environment. For Advisors endorsing multiple applicants within a single call, a ranking must be provided to the Review Panel. Biosketches and letter will be judged according to the criteria detailed in Section 8.1.

6.1 Proposed Advisor(s) Guidelines

An eligible researcher can only support three [3] applications per round as a lead or co-advisor

7.0 Application Process

7.1 Application Forms

Detailed instructions for applicants are provided in the application form found on the program website.

7.2 Tier I/Tier II status

The decision on the Tier I/Tier II status will be made by the selection committee based on the experience of each applicant. The application is the same for both Tiers.

7.3 <u>Submission to BrainsCAN</u>

The completed application package, including all letters, must be received at brainscan@uwo.ca by 11:59pm (Eastern time) on the day of deadline.

7.4 <u>Equity and Diversity Survey</u>

Please complete and submit the Self-Identification Survey found at the BrainsCAN website. The personal information collected by this survey will be used for educational, administrative and statistical purposes only and will be stored by the BrainsCAN Administration Staff to maintain confidentiality. The form is completely voluntary and will not be used in the evaluation of the application. The survey can be sent separately to the application to Fay Harrison (BrainsCAN Executive Director and Equity & Diversity Co-Chair; fay.harrison@uwo.ca)

7.5 <u>Troubleshooting</u>

During the application development phase, prospective applicants are encouraged to contact the BrainsCAN team with any questions. *See section 10.0 below for contact details.*

8.0 Review Process

8.1 <u>Review Criteria</u>

Applications will be evaluated according to the following criteria. The last three criteria are adapted from Appendix A of the CIHR Reviewer's Guide for Fellowship Awards: http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/26720.html#a7). The first two criteria are assessed as a binary, yes/no, sufficient/insufficient decision. Note that failure to pass either of these two criteria will result in an unsuccessful application.

8.1.1. Alignment with BrainsCAN

- Whether the proposed research adequately aligns with BrainsCAN aims will be assessed on a yes/no basis.

8.1.2 Research Training Environment

- Quality of the research training environment will be assessed on a sufficient/insufficient basis.
    - o Determine if the space, facilities and personnel support that is available to the applicant is appropriate for the proposed research goals.
    - o Determine whether the proposed advisor(s) demonstrate a commitment to the development of the applicant's research

project (funding, facilities, equipment, etc.) and professional development.

- o Host labs demonstrate a track record of excellent research impact appropriate for the career level of the Principal Investigator. Criteria for recognition of work as significant vary by discipline, but might include publications (quantity, quality and citations), patents, record of external funding, record of training of HQP, and indices of ability to communicate research effectively.

8.1.3. Achievements and Activities of Candidate (Overall weight - 60%)

- Honours, Awards and Academic Distinctions (10%):
  - o Assess the number, importance and breadth of the candidate's official recognitions and special distinctions relative to their education, training and work experience.
  - o Note the length of time required to complete academic programs and any indications of special academic distinctions received.
  - o Determine relevance to research and whether the recognition is regional, national or international.
- Publications and Related Research Achievements (50%):
  - o Research funding entries whereby the applicant was formally recorded as co-applicant, co-investigator, co-knowledge user, collaborator, decision maker, policy maker, principal applicant, principal investigator or principal knowledge user. Training awards (e.g. predoctoral scholarships) may be entered in this section but they should be assessed as part of the "Honours, Awards and Academic Distinction" criterion.
  - o Evidence of research achievements relative to opportunities to date. Bear in mind that opportunities to publish may vary according to research discipline and life course (e.g., health professional career, time spent raising children, etc.).
  - o For publications, observe the number of co-authors and the position of the candidate's name in the authors list (note that the importance of this position can vary depending on the discipline, etc.).
  - o The candidate's role in publications and their estimated percent contribution to the work, as well as the type of publication (e.g., paper, article, chapter, book, etc.)

- Try to get a sense of the entire body of work and its likely impact. Note the publication dates and relate them to the candidate's education and training. Consider the list of abstracts as an indication of conference presentation activities.
- Consider the candidate's other professional activities, and any patents or copyrights to which the candidate contributed.

8.1.4. Referees' Assessment of the Candidate's Characteristics and Abilities (Overall weight - 15%)

- Look for evidence from the referees that the candidate exhibits the characteristics and skills that correlate with research career achievement.
- Examine the referees' assessments, recognizing that positive comments are common while negative ones are not.
- Read the supporting text carefully, taking note of the extent to which the referees justify their statements.
- Look particularly for indications that the referees perceive the candidate as an investigative type, that is, someone whose thinking is critical, questioning, original and independent.
- Indications that the sponsors perceive the candidate as both energetic and capable of being highly focused.
- Look for mention of creativity in setting research goals, designing experiments, developing new methodologies, interpreting findings and presenting results in writing.
- Consider the following:
  - How long has the referee known the candidate?
  - What is the relationship of the referee to the candidate?

8.1.5. Research/Training Plan and Environment (Overall weight – 25%)

- Training Expectations (10%):
  - Assess the clarity and logic of the candidate's plans for a research career and the relevance of the proposed training.
  - Assess the description of how the training they expect to acquire will contribute to their productivity and to the research goals they hope to achieve, and how this award will enable them to establish themselves as independent investigators.
  - Justification of what they expect to learn from the training experience.

- o Evaluate the alignment and synergy between the applicant's research skills and the training opportunities expected to be provided by the proposed host lab(s).

- Proposed Research Project (15%):
  - o Determine if the candidate will be able to complete the proposed research, given their education, experience and interests. Is the project the right balance of challenge, importance of the research question and feasibility in relation to the candidate's experience and training?
  - o Is the research project innovative for the lab or labs in which the applicant will be working?
  - o The proposed research project summary should:
    - Include the specific hypothesis and describe the candidate's role on the project;
    - Provide a concise account of the subject matter, an overview of each part of the research plan, specific project aims and the methodology;
    - Reflect the significance of the project.

9.0 Post-award Processes

9.1 Award Acceptance:

The award must be accepted within 15 working days of the date of offer or the award may be cancelled and potentially offered to the next fundable applicant.

9.2 Funding Start Date

Successful applicants must begin their award by May 15, 2020. For individuals who do not yet hold a doctoral degree, awards will only begin after proof is provided that the recipient has completed all the requirements of the PhD program, including the oral examination. For foreign applicants coming to Canada, awards may only begin after proof of an entry visa into Canada is provided.

9.3 Reapplication/Renewal Process

During the terminal year of the Postdoctoral Fellowship funding term, an application for a renewal of funding can be submitted. Tier II PDFs may apply for a single additional year, while Tier I PDFs are able to request a two-year extension. The renewal process is under

development and its evaluation will be directly linked to external funding success and/or exceptional productivity.

9.4 External Funding and Salary Top-up Details

All BrainsCAN Postdoctoral Fellows are encouraged to pursue external funding (e.g., NSERC, CIHR, or SSHRC postdoctoral fellowship), if eligible, in their first year of funding. Postdoctoral Fellows (existing BrainsCAN, and others at Western conducting BrainsCAN-relevant research) receiving a Tri-council fellowship or another external fellowship worth $40,000 CAD or more per year will receive, for each of the years of their external award, a salary supplement from BrainsCAN to bring their total salary to $60,000 (plus 13% benefits) at the Tier II level, or $75,000 (plus 13% benefits) at the Tier I level.

9.4.1 PDFs holding a BrainsCAN Fellowship

Any BrainsCAN PDF that receives external funding greater than $40,000 will automatically receive the salary increase of $5000/year for the duration of the external award. **Please forward the award details to** brainscan@uwo.ca **upon receipt**.

9.4.2 PDFs not holding a BrainsCAN Fellowship

Any PDF engaged in BrainsCAN-aligned research that receives external funding greater than $40,000 can apply to BrainsCAN for Tier II top-up status, or greater than $60,000 for Tier I top-up status. **To apply, the PDF must provide a cover letter signed by the applicant and their advisor describing the alignment to BrainsCAN, the letter of award, and the award application to** brainscan@uwo.ca **by the earliest program deadline**. The alignment to BrainsCAN's mandate will be evaluated. For any externally funded PDF eligible for the Tier II top-up level who wishes to pursue Tier I, a full application to the program is required.

9.5 Recognition and Reporting

All BrainsCAN Postdoctoral Scholars should acknowledge the support of CFREF and BrainsCAN in all related presentations and publications. Successful applicants will be required to complete progress reports outlining how this grant enriched their research, contributed to transforming their research field, and developed their career. These reports will be coordinated through the BrainsCAN Project Manager.

9.6 Frequency of applications

An applicant can submit a single application per program call (competition). Provided the applicant meets the eligibility requirements, there is no limit to number of competitions to which an applicant can submit an application.

10.0   Contact information

The competition is administered by BrainsCAN's administrative team (brainscan@uwo.ca). For specific questions please contact Ryan Salewski, Project Manager (ext: 86801; ryan.salewski@uwo.ca)