Competition: 2020 - Winter

Version: 2.0

Date: October 31, 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 were awarded to 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 BrainsCAN Graduate Studentship Program Philosophy and Structure

Training the next generation of researchers is a key aim of the BrainsCAN initiative. The BrainsCAN Graduate Studentship program has been developed to attract the world's most promising graduate students to Western University. The program supports graduate students proposing research projects in cognitive neuroscience.

2.1 Program Targets

In the 2020 competition, this program aims to fund **up to 5** prospective graduate students; however, the actual number of funded students will be determined by the excellence of the candidates.

2.1.1 BrainsCAN Computational Studentship Stream

Funds have been secured from the BrainsCAN Computational core to support graduate student that meet the mandate described at the [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 Important Dates

It is strongly recommended that all potential applicants review Western's Graduate School Admission procedures and academic calendar prior to preparing their application to this program

- o Application deadline: **Feb 1st, 2020**
- o Expected results: **April 2020**

3.0 Funding Level and Term

3.1 Master's Funding Level and Term

The Master's Studentship stream will ensure a minimum stipend of $25,000 with BrainsCAN contributing $20,000 and an additional $5,000 being contributed by their supervisor and/or faculty (i.e WGRS). If a successful applicant then receives additional external funding of at least $15,000 (i.e. CGS-M, or OGS), their annual compensation will increase to $30,000 (i.e. $10K BrainsCAN, $15K External award and $5K supervisor/faculty) for the duration of the external award.

The term of the Master's Studentship is a maximum of 2 years, provided the awardee is pursuing an eligible research project.

3.2 PhD Funding Level and Term

The PhD Studentship stream will ensure a minimum stipend of $35,000 with BrainsCAN contributing $30,000 and their supervisor contributing $5,000. The funding commitment from BrainsCAN and the supervising faculty member are independent of the University or departmental contributions. If a successful applicant then receives additional external funding of at least $15,000 (i.e. CGS-D, or OGS), their annual compensation will increase to $40,000 (i.e. $20K BrainsCAN, $15K External award and $5K supervisor) for the duration of the external award.

The term of the Doctoral Studentship is a maximum of 4 years, provided the awardee is pursuing an eligible research project.

4.0 Applicant Eligibility

The applicants must be intending to enroll in a **master's or doctoral program** at Western University. Applicants currently enrolled in a graduate program at Western are not eligible.

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 **required to propose projects that will link two or more labs**.

6.0 Proposed Supervisor Guidelines

- The proposed supervisor 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.
- The proposed supervisor is required to provide a minimum of $5,000 of stipend support.
- A supervisor can only support 1 application per round.
- Each advisor must provide *a Biosketch in the NIH formal* *https://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms/biosketch.htm*.
- ***A letter of support must be submitted and signed by the supervisor.*** The letter of support should detail the space, facilities and personnel support available to the applicant, and justify the novelty and innovative nature of the project. Each letter should also include a statement

of commitment to the professional development of the applicant as well as describe how Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) principles are embedded in their research environment.

7.0 Application Process

7.1 Application Forms

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

2.1.1 Official Transcripts

Applicants are required to submit as a PDF document up-to-date official transcripts of their complete academic record (this includes all undergraduate and graduate studies, completed or ongoing).

- Transcripts printed from the applicant's personal institution account are not accepted.

- Up-to-date official transcripts are defined as transcripts issued by the Registrar's Office and dated or issued in the fall session of the year of the application (if currently registered) or after the last term completed (if not currently registered). Opening the envelope to scan the transcript will not render it unofficial for this purpose.

- Certified true copies of official transcripts from the institution are accepted. A certified true copy is defined as a copy of the original document (or of the original translated document if official transcript is not in either English or French).

- Applicants who are or were registered at an institution that does not provide transcripts must submit, in lieu of a transcript, a letter bearing the official institution seal/stamp or a letter signed by the Dean of Graduate Studies confirming the applicant's program of study, the applicant's registration status, the date of initial registration, the degree obtained or sought and the fact that the institution does not provide transcripts.

7.2 Submission to BrainsCAN

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

7.3 Equity and Diversity Survey

Please complete and submit the Self-Identification Survey found on 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)

7.4 Troubleshooting

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 Review Criteria

Applications will be evaluated according to the following criteria. 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.) The last three criteria are adapted from Appendix A of the CIHR Reviewer's Guide for Doctoral Awards: http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/33043.html.

8.1.1. Alignment with BrainsCAN

- The proposed research adequately aligns with BrainsCAN aims (yes/no)

8.1.2 Research Training Environment

- Quality of the research training environment will be assessed on a sufficient/insufficient basis:
    o The space, facilities and personnel support that is available to the applicant is appropriate for the proposed research goals.
    o An interdisciplinary research environment that engages two or more labs.
    o The proposed advisor(s) demonstrates a commitment to the development of the applicant's research project (funding, facilities, equipment, etc.) and professional development.
    o Host lab demonstrates a track record of excellent research impact appropriate for the career level of the Principal Investigator. Criteria for recognition of work can significantly 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 - 35%)

- Publication Activity (10%):
    o Articles and other publications produced by the candidate. Consider presentations in the assessment of other research activity (see below).

- Publication activity of the candidate relative to expectations of someone with their academic experience. This includes articles published in peer-reviewed journals, or accepted for publication, as well as pre-prints or other non-peer reviewed outlets (i.e. Bioarchives).
- Breadth of science covered and the frequency of publication.
- Bear in mind that publication activity patterns vary among health science disciplines.

- Other Research Activity (10%):
  - Presentations, research prizes and other indicators of the candidate's research productivity.
  - Research activity of the candidate relative to your expectations of someone with their academic experience.
  - Breadth of science covered, size and importance of meetings involved, frequency of conference presentations and research honors or awards.

- Academic Performance (15%):
  - Undergraduate academic transcripts and, if available, graduate transcripts.
  - Considerations:
    - Type of program and courses pursued
    - Course load
    - Grades obtained
    - Relative standing (if available)
    - Overall average
    - Trend (give credit for a steadily improving or consistently good performance)

8.1.4. Characteristics and Abilities of the Candidate (Overall weight - 40%)

- Reference letters
- Considerations:
  - the extent to which the box scores and narratives are consistent.
  - Reference letters are from supervisors/mentors under whom the candidate has trained and/or who have had a good opportunity to assess their potential for research.
  - the length of time that the sponsor has known the candidate.
  - the relationship of the sponsor to the candidate.

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

- Training Expectations (10%):

- o Clarity and logic of the candidate's plans for a research career and the relevance of the proposed training.
- o Clear 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.
- o Justification of what they expect to learn from the training experience.
- o 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 Feasibility: the candidates 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 in 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 are expected to begin the award at the earliest possible date as determined by Western's Academic calendar. All awards are conditional on the applicant being accepted to the Western University graduate program affiliated with this proposed supervisor's Faculty/Department. For foreign applicants coming to Canada, awards may only begin after proof of an entry visa into Canada is provided.

9.3 Recognition and Reporting

All BrainsCAN Graduate Students 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.

9.4 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 the 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)