NeuroConnect Funding Guidelines

Overview & Objective

Translating neuroscience research into practical, community-based applications or bench-to-bedside research can be challenging. A key obstacle is the disconnect amongst researchers, community partners, patients, implementation scientists, industry partners and policymakers. To enhance the impact of neuroscience research in the community, we need to develop more effective mechanisms for translating research findings into real-world applications. Building and strengthening partnerships among researchers, clinicians and community partners is essential to bridge this gap and ensure that neuroscience research benefits those it aims to serve. Increased interdisciplinary research capacity and committed community co-creators can result in community-relevant research, with community-ready research outcomes.

The Western Institute for Neuroscience (WIN) has developed the NeuroConnect program that will support community co-created research proposals that mobilize interdisciplinary research teams to promote societal benefit for community identified challenges in neuroscience, supporting these teams through project conception to program development. The *Sustainable Brain Health* theme seeks to promote research and development of strategies that promote brain health in aging populations, and/or strategies or interventions to treat or prevent neurodegenerative diseases of aging.

Teams funded through this initiative will be poised to respond to interdisciplinary funding calls, and engagement with key community knowledge users will translate to greater knowledge mobilization and implementation success.

WIN will select one proposal under the theme of *Sustainable Brain Health* for this award. Individual awards will initially provide up to a maximum of $200 000/year for two years to support expenses related to the project. Applicants must submit a budget that covers the initial 2-year project plan with clear mutually agreed upon milestones. Beyond the initial 2-year period, projects may be renewable on a year-by-year basis, dependent on impact deliverables, for a maximum funding period of five years. WIN will work closely with the selected team and provide in-kind staff support for project management, grant development for large funding opportunities, development of advancement materials for fundraising from donors, and support for community engagement and outreach. The application is an iterative process, and applicants may receive feedback on their applications, and/or be asked to make changes.

APPLICABILITY: The Western Institute for Neuroscience's NeuroConnect program is designed to build and strengthen vital connections between Western researchers and community organizations and members. Eligible teams must be composed of at least 2 Western Faculty members and at least one community partner. Community organizations can include, but are not limited to, not-profit groups, industry partners, local and/or provincial community organizations, and people with lived experiences. A Western Faculty member must be listed as the lead PI, while community partners, faculty members, and affiliate members can be co-leads. The responsibilities of all co-leads should be clearly defined, and the roles of community members or organizations should provide insights into community needs and facilitating outreach.

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WIN invites applications from all eligible individuals and is committed to supporting high-quality interdisciplinary projects involving designated groups that adhere to all relevant EDI principles, guidelines, and policies adopted by the university (see " Canada Research Chair Program – Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Action Plan")

IMPORTANT DATES:

Theme : Healthy Brain Aging

Call for Submissions:	By August 30, 2024
Full Applications Due*:	Extended to November 29, 2024
Anticipated Decision Date:	January 24, 2025
Anticipated Funding Period (start-date to end-date):	February 10, 2025, to February 10, 2027
Progress Report:	Every 6 months

Proposal Submission

All proposals must be submitted using the NeuroConnect Template. Completed proposals must be sent to win@uwo.ca by 5:00pm, November 29th, 2024.

A successful proposal should include the following:

Lay Summary (200 words max): *Provide an overview of the proposed project. Include a brief description of the problem you are trying to solve. What is your unique solution to this problem? How will this solution change the lives of the people you wish to serve? What partnerships will the project have? What will success look like?*

Background Statement (250 words max): *What is the key issue this proposal will address? Who is affected by this pressing concern?*

What is your Approach to addressing this key challenge (250 words max): *How are you achieving, or working towards achieving, a solution or result for this big issue? Provide broad strokes for what will be achieved over the lifespan of the project, with more specific details on what will be achieved during the first two years of funding.*

Community Engagement (250 words max): *Who in the community are you partnering with? How are these partners being included? Are larger community engagement activities planned? Letters of Support are strongly encouraged if working with community organizations, which detail how they are or will be involved in different stages of the project (conception, project design, data collection, data analysis, knowledge translation, community engagement, implementation, etc). There is no limit for community letters of support.*

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Describe your team and their capacity to tackle this key issue (300 words max): *What proven capabilities does your unit have? Describe how team members will contribute to the project. Community organizations can be included here, as well as individuals from community organizations, and people with relevant lived experience (for example, people living with dementia, people who are or have been a caregiver for someone with a neurodegenerative disorder of aging).*

Anticipated Outcomes and Impact (250 words max): *What impact do you expect if you secure the requisite funding? Who will benefit? How will they benefit? How will you measure success of your approach? How will you measure wider community impact? What outcomes do you expect after the first year of funding?*

Resource Requirements (150 words max): *What do you need to make this a reality? Include approximate costs where necessary for the first two years of funding. The maximum amount to be awarded is $200 000 each year.*

Funding plan (250 words max): *Over the life cycle of the project, what future funding opportunities will you apply to? What are the long-term goals of this project if future funding is obtained? Identify immediate needs that can be obtained with help from fundraising.*

References (1 page max)

Supplementary Materials (optional)
This section may be used to provide the evidence to support the rationale and/or feasibility of the work described, or be information cited in the proposal. Supplementary materials may include:
Preliminary or pilot data- 1 page max
Letter of permission to use samples/data- no limit
Letters of support from community organizations involved in the project-no limit

The Western Institute for Neuroscience reserves the right to exclude from competition any submissions that are incomplete, inconsistent, or submitted late.

Applicant Criteria

General Eligibility:

Projects must include one Faculty member at the lead PI, and at least one other Faculty member from Western University. Community organization representatives, other community partners, and affiliate faculty members are eligible to be co-leads. The designated lead PI will hold the funding, but the creation of subawards are permissible for Western Faculty co-leads.

Project Time Period:

Funding for successful applications will last for a period of two years from the funding start date, with yearly renewals possible, contingent upon meeting mutually agreed upon milestones. Projects may be funded for a maximum of five years.

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Criteria:

The criteria listed below will be used by the review committee.

Criteria	Description
Interdisciplinary Team 20%	• Does your team have the necessary expertise to successfully tackle this challenge? • Does the proposed project take advantage of the unique features of the team and research environment? • The proposed project must combine elements from at least two different disciplines, exclusive of any community partnerships.
Community Engagement 20%	• Has your proposal been co-created with community partners? • Are your community partners well suited or sufficiently prepared to aid in the proposed project? • Is there planned community engagement throughout the proposed project?
Budget Funding Plan 10%	• Are the resources required sufficient and appropriate to conduct the proposed project? • How will the community partner benefit from the funding request? • Are large funding opportunities included in the funding plan?
Approach 30%	• Is the proposed approach appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project? • Are the overall strategy and methodology well-reasoned and feasible? • Are community needs incorporated into the proposed approach?
Outcome and Impact 20%	• Are the anticipated outcomes aligned with the research design and feasible? • How would the results advance knowledge of best practices to promote sustainable brain health? • Are the community partners and/or the larger community expected to benefit from the proposed project? • Have methods to measure and evaluate impact been included?

Ethics Approvals: Humans Animals & Biohazards:

All proposals involving research ethics: human subjects, animal subjects, or biohazardous materials, must be approved by the appropriate Western certification review committee. If awarded, funds will be released when the appropriate approvals are confirmed.

Accounts and Expenses:

Individual awards are up to a maximum of $200 000/yr to support expenses related to the project, renewable for a maximum funding period of 5 years. Each award will be set up as an "unrestricted research account" through Western Research, expected to be accessible at the beginning of the funding period.

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Applicants are expected to expend the funds in the manner proposed in the original request within 24 months. The host Faculty will be responsible for ensuring standard salary and benefits, including unused vacation and/or severance as well as any other related costs are covered for all staff and trainees supported by the award, for the duration of the project

Program Requirements:

Reporting:

Progress reporting is due every 6 months, and will include information on milestones, funding, and outcomes. A link to the form will be provided by the WIN staff.

Final report: A final report detailing project accomplishments and outcomes will be requested at the end of the funding period by the lead PI(s) to complete. A link to the report will be provided by the WIN staff. Project updates beyond the final report may be requested from time to time for WIN annual reporting.

Strategic Plan: The successful team will work with WIN to develop a strategic plan for their proposed project that outlines short- and long-term goals, with plans for future funding applications.

Funding Acknowledgement:

All publications and presentations arising from research funded in whole or part by a WIN award should include acknowledgement of support from the Western Institute of Neuroscience.

This work/study was/is supported/funded by <name of research award> from the Western Institute for Neuroscience at Western University.

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