



## ASPIRATION RESEARCH CLUSTER PROGRAM CALL FOR PROPOSALS

**Round 2 deadlines: NOI: November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Full Application: January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024**

[Aspiration 2030](#) priorities include investing strategically to support research excellence, incentivizing interdisciplinary collaboration, and raising the profile of our research impact areas. UVic's Office of the Vice-President Research and Innovation (OVPRI) is pleased to announce the second round of Aspiration Research Cluster funding, which provides opportunities for UVic-led research clusters to apply for internal support to enable growth and impact.

In this context, research clusters are groups or networks of researchers with complementary and interdisciplinary expertise who work together to achieve a better and richer understanding of a common set of research questions than they could attain working individually. Clusters should reflect a program of research rather than a specific research project. This competition is open to UVic faculty from all disciplines.

### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Aspiration Research Cluster program provides capacity-building resources and support to propel interdisciplinary research teams **to address important economic or societal challenges**. We are looking for clusters that have the potential to develop into global leaders on relevant topics, and that will use cluster funding to position themselves to compete for **major new external funding** (e.g. NFRF Transformation, SSHRC Partnership Grant, CFI Innovation Fund, major NSERC Alliance, governmental programs, donors or foundations, international grants, etc.) and demonstrate **significant impact** (e.g., new strategic partnerships, generate meaningful intellectual property for licensing or commercialization activities, creation of new centre or institute, influencing public policy or major government directions, leading public discourse on major issues, etc.).

Clusters should be able to sustain activity that continues their impact beyond the two-year period covered by this program.

This is a pilot program with two rounds of funding. In the first round of the competition, six groups were awarded the title Aspiration Research Cluster, representing over 70 UVic faculty members across the 10 faculties. All clusters brought together multidisciplinary teams to collaboratively tackle critical issues and address local and global challenges and opportunities. To learn more about each of the clusters funded in round one, please visit [our webpage](#). Ongoing funding is subject to program success and availability of resources.

Key dates for the competition:



## ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Clusters can emerge from any discipline, but those that align with the Aspiration 2030 impact areas and/or institutional priorities are of particular interest.

Note: Research clusters are not intended to replace Research Centres. Research Centre members are eligible to apply as part of a cluster. Clusters may also be hosted by a Research Centre, be a subset of a Research Centre, or involve multiple Research Centres. However, such applications need to explain the additional benefit that the cluster would provide outside of the existing mandate, which the centre does not already provide.

## TEAM COMPOSITION

- Cluster members should include researchers from relevant disciplines and diverse perspectives who receive funding from varied sources.
- Each cluster should have a nominated cluster lead/PI (and up to 3 Co-PIs if desired) who will provide leadership and be responsible for correspondence about the clusters, including updates and annual reporting. The PI should be a full-time UVic research faculty member.
- Faculty members may participate in more than one cluster but cannot be the designated PI/Co-PI for more than one cluster (existing or proposed).
- Clusters may include external partners from research institutions, industry, NGOs, foundations, hospitals, government, or international partners. Relevant partnerships involved in downstream commercialization or implementation steps are an asset.
- Inclusion of early-career researchers and members of equity-deserving groups is encouraged.
- Team members will need to articulate how long they have been collaborating for and in what capacity (noting existing projects, partnerships, grant applications, etc.). It is expected that cluster members are already collaborating or have demonstrated strong potential to collaborate.

## ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

Cluster funding is intended to support catalytic activities that will help to build the identity and collaboration potential of the cluster and could be used as leverage to apply for major research funding,

to build cluster capacity, develop research plans, organize cluster-building events, or communicate achievements (see full list of eligible expenses below).

Each cluster may apply for any amount up to a total of \$100,000.

Funding can be used to cover the following expenses:

- Salaries for essential staff for cluster activities (e.g., cluster or communications/event coordinators, program manager)
- Course releases for participating UVic faculty members, only where they are justified by specific activities in building research capacity or applying for major grants – with Chair/Dean approval (max. two per cluster, per year, for a total of four releases during the two-year funding period)
- Honoraria for community members and/or elders participating in cluster activities
- Capacity-building events (e.g., venue rental, catering)
- Cluster meetings, retreats, workshops, especially those aimed at generating major funding applications
- Professional facilitation for team-building or strategic planning
- Professional grant writing and editing
- Matching funds for major external grants that involve multiple cluster members (these funds will constitute the OVPRI contribution to such projects)
- Travel (e.g., partnership-building, invited guests)
- Non-academic publications (e.g., annual report)
- Website development and social media coordination
- Expenses that support equity, diversity, and inclusion (e.g., external EDI consultant support, interpretation for events, provision of childcare during meetings)

Other expenses must be well justified and approved in advance by emailing [strategicpo2@uvic.ca](mailto:strategicpo2@uvic.ca).

Funding cannot be used as a substitute for applying for external funding or replacement for other existing internal and/or external funding. Cluster funding is not intended to support the direct costs of individual research projects.

Each cluster will be funded for up to two years, with funding for year two contingent upon receipt and approval of an annual report to the OVPRI that details progress towards the goals, milestones, and outcomes articulated in the proposal.

Any fund balances at year-end can be carried over to the second year, and teams may be given a one-year no-cost extension period in which to spend any remaining funds. An explanation for unspent funds should be provided in the annual report.

## EVALUATION AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

Applications will be reviewed by a multidisciplinary committee chaired by the Director of Strategic Research Initiatives employing a transparent and equitable evaluation process. Final approval and funding distribution will be provided by the VP Research and Innovation, taking into account the recommendation of the committee and other institutional strategic considerations. Applications will be assessed on the following criteria:

- Research excellence and potential impact which:
  - Addresses an important challenge in an area where UVic has pre-existing strengths and a chance to raise our profile.

- Has potential to achieve measurable impacts on society and benefits to Canada.
- Aligns with at least one of the impact areas or priorities outlined in Aspiration 2030.
- Strength of the team and complementarity which shows:
  - Established excellence of the team members in terms of research productivity, funding and partnerships.
  - Collaborations involving relevant disciplines and diverse perspectives with a varied funding portfolio.
  - Diversity in membership, including early-career researchers and individuals from equity-deserving groups.
  - Synergy between team members, with a history of productive collaboration.
- Cluster plan
  - Clear description of goal(s) and outcomes of the cluster (e.g., increase in external funding applications and research productivity, strategic partnership development, impact on society, potential economic development, etc.) and a clear and credible plan to achieve goal(s) and outcomes
  - Sustainability beyond period of cluster support
  - Dissemination and outreach strategy

## APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

The call has three steps, a notice of intent, full application, and a proposal pitch.

### STEP 1: NOTICE OF INTENT

The NOI is mandatory. This will be used to establish the program eligibility of each cluster and to establish the required expertise for review of full applications. Titles of clusters, summary and PI/Co-PI names/departments will be shared with other applicants and Grant Officers to encourage potential collaboration. Feedback may be provided at this stage.

NOIs should be submitted via the online form by **November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023**; the form will ask for the following information:

- Title of cluster
- Cluster lead (PI) plus any Co-PIs if applicable (max 3)
- Aspiration 2030 impact area addressed
- Brief summary of area of research, key challenges, and the goals and objectives of the cluster (250 words max.)
- Proposed cluster activities and description of proposed expenses (200 words max.)
- Amount of funding requested

## STEP 2: FULL APPLICATION

Applications will be submitted via an online form by **January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024**. The submission system will open in early January.

The online form will require applicants to input details about the cluster (title, PI, team members and affiliations). You will then need to upload your [Research Clusters Application Template](#) (uploaded as a single PDF). Please use an 8 ½" x 11" format, single-spaced, 11pt font, and 2cm margins all around) and include the following sections:

1. Cluster Overview (maximum 250 words)
  - Provide a lay summary of the proposed research cluster
2. Cluster Description (maximum 1 page)
  - What is the challenge this cluster is addressing?
  - How does this interdisciplinary research cluster respond to and address key challenges/problems?
  - Why is a Cluster needed?
  - What are the objectives of the Cluster and the activities proposed to fulfill these objectives?
  - Describe how you plan to grow the research productivity and institutional impact of the cluster on a sustainable basis, including your plans to secure continuing external funding and to disseminate and increase the uptake of the research.
3. Cluster Outcomes & Impact (maximum 1 page) **(NEW)**
  - What are the planned outcomes and outputs of the Cluster, short and long-term?
  - How will the Cluster activities be translated or transformed into research impact and raise the profile of the work at UVic as well as potential impact nationally and globally?
  - Explain the activities and impact this funding will have that would not be possible otherwise. How will establishing a cluster with the proposed funding allow the work to expand to a new level?
4. Team (maximum 4 pages)
  - List each research team member and describe their proposed role in the cluster, what they will contribute to the cluster's development, and how they complement/add value to the team.
  - Discuss how the members constitute an interdisciplinary team that will successfully achieve the cluster goal(s) with the requested supports.
  - Describe any track record of collaboration, including significant funding the team has received to date.
  - Describe existing external partners, and their contribution to the cluster.
5. Budget (maximum 2 pages)
  - Include an itemized yearly budget for the total funding request (any amount up to \$100K total over 1-2 years) and a justification for each expense. Indicate how each expense relates or contributes to specific cluster outcomes/goals. Please add rows to the tables below as necessary.
  - Examples of categories to include: salaries (for a cluster coordinator, event coordinator etc.), events and meetings (workshops, cluster meetings etc.), travel (travel for guest speakers etc.), grant-writing and editing, honoraria, EDI expenses (EDI training,

compensation for EDI guest speakers, childcare costs for cluster members etc.), course releases<sup>1</sup>

6. Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Plan (maximum 1 page)

- Discuss how the cluster will meaningfully engage and be inclusive of underrepresented groups and early-career researchers. It is recommended that team members review [UVic's Equity Action Plan](#) and [Indigenous Plan](#), as well as [NSERC's EDI resources](#) and [NFRF's EDI resources](#) to develop an EDI plan for their cluster. Discuss how the cluster will meaningfully engage and be inclusive of underrepresented groups<sup>2</sup> and early-career researchers.
- How are EDI principles applied to the project design, methods, analysis, interpretation and dissemination of project findings?
- What actions will be implemented to build and maintain safe and inclusive work environments for all individuals within your team, including those who are racialized, African, Caribbean, and Black; Indigenous Peoples; persons with disabilities; women and individuals who are from the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities?

7. References (optional; maximum 1 page)

8. Dean(s) sign-off page - [download Dean sign-off page](#)

### STEP 3: PITCH YOUR PROPOSAL

A shortlist of applicants will be asked to pitch their proposals at a meeting to be arranged after all applications are received.

**Questions about the program or how to apply? Email [strategicpo2@uvic.ca](mailto:strategicpo2@uvic.ca).**

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<sup>1</sup> Maximum 2 course releases per cluster, per year, for a total of four releases in a 2-year funding period, and should only be included where time will be used for administrative activities.

<sup>2</sup> Includes members of groups with historical and/or current barriers to equity, including, but not limited to:

- First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, and all other Indigenous Peoples;
- members of groups that commonly experience discrimination due to race, ancestry, colour, religion and/or spiritual beliefs, or place of origin;
- persons with visible and/or invisible (physical and/or mental) disabilities;
- persons who identify as women; and
- persons of marginalized sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.