

Strategies and Resources for Successful Grant Writing

Golnaz Farhat, Research Development Officer

Jeremy Knight, Director, Research Development

Research Services, Division of the Vice-President Research
and Innovation, and Strategic Initiatives

October 10, 2025

Snapshot of grant success rates in 2024

Program	U of T	National
CFI Innovation Fund	22%	34%
CIHR Project Grant	17%	16%
NSERC Discovery Grant	64%	63%
SSHRC Insight Grant	39%	34%
SSHRC Partnership Development Grant	38%	41%
SSHRC Partnership Grant	20%	21%
NFRF Exploration	15%	17%

Common weaknesses identified by reviewers



- Not novel or innovative
- Overly ambitious / lacks focus
- Objectives are not clear, cohesive or clearly linked to one another
- Approach is not clear / justified / feasible
- Impact and significance are not clear or appropriate
- Lacks appropriate expertise
- Challenges not addressed; mitigation strategies missing
- Does not align with sponsor's priorities
- Does not adhere to program guidelines
- Proposal is difficult to read and understand

What it takes for your proposal to be successful



Grant-writing is different from academic writing

- The facts are not enough
- You must persuade the reviewers
- A successful proposal is a well-crafted and strategic **sales pitch**

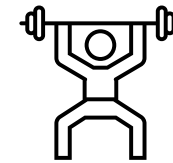
Two questions drive the reviewers' decision

SHOULD they
do it?



SIGNIFICANT?
IMPACTFUL?
INNOVATIVE?

CAN they
do it?



right TEAM?
right APPROACH?
right ENVIRONMENT?

Understand the sponsor's priorities and objectives

- Adapt your pitch (within reason!) to fit the sponsor's priorities—if it won't fit, don't force it.
- If you're not sure, ASK

Hint:

Use language from the sponsor's program description in your proposal

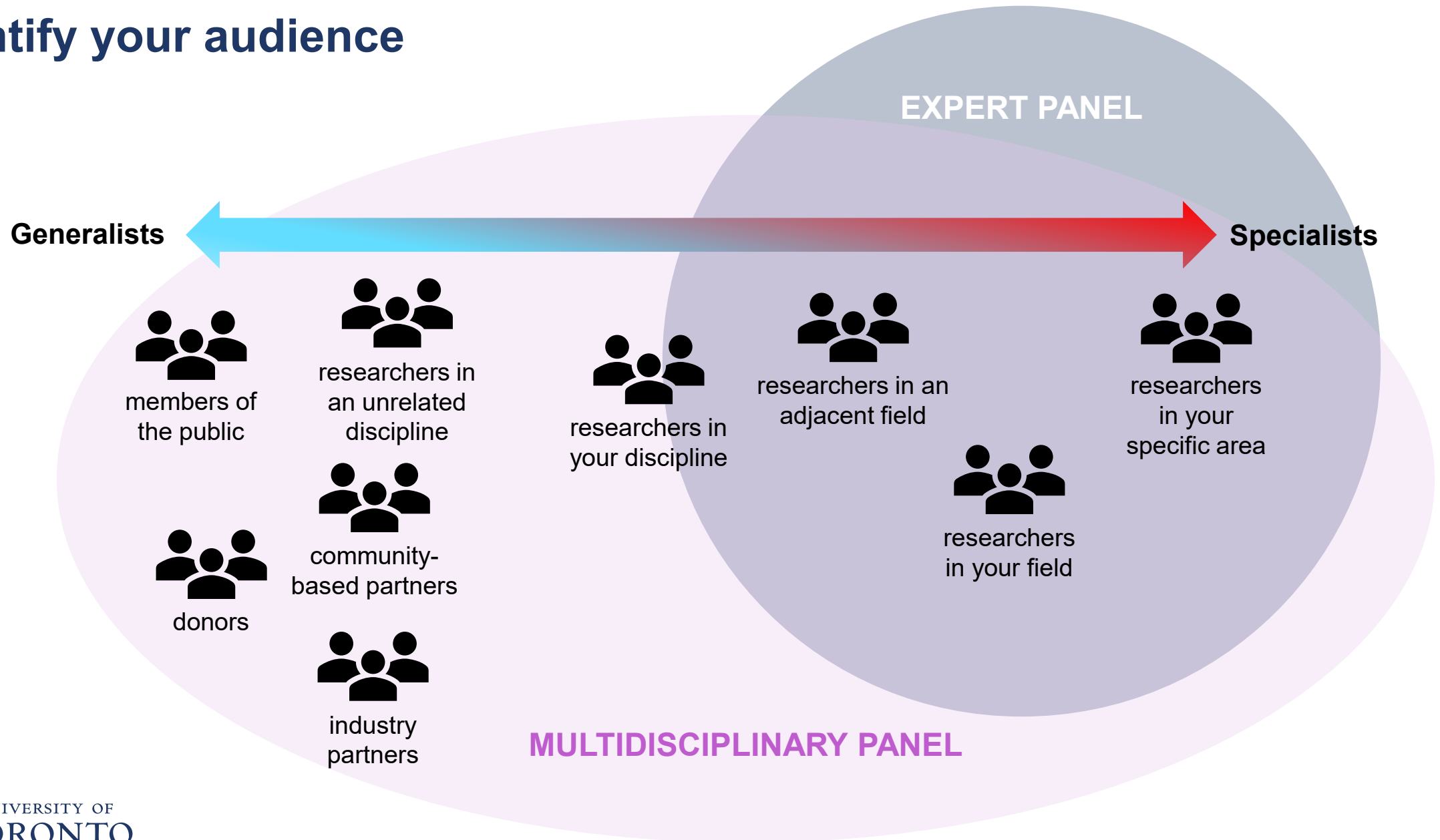


SPONSOR
PRIORITIES &
OBJECTIVES



Disciplinary area
Interdisciplinarity
Impact
Partnerships
Community
Timeline
Team composition

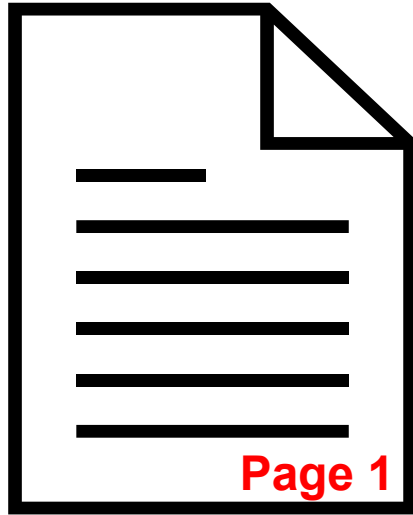
Identify your audience



Err on the side of a generalist audience

- Provide enough detail to satisfy the **specialists**
- Write in language that is accessible to the **generalists**
- Avoid jargon, limit acronyms, define technical terms
- Avoid broad, vague statements—be specific
- Limit background information to what is directly relevant to the proposal

Immediately tell the reviewer what you propose



1. What is the problem you are going to solve? Why should we care?
2. How will you solve it?
 - clearly outline your objectives
 - briefly describe your approach
 - tell us why you are the person/team to do it
 - include only essential background information
3. What is the expected outcome/impact? Why should we be excited?

(For more tips on how to write a persuasive introduction, see slides 57-68 [here](#))

Persuade the reviewer through storytelling

- Engage with the reviewer and make them feel invested in your success
- Humanize your proposal—identify those who will be most impacted by your work and tell their story
 - socioeconomic context
 - health context
 - research context
 - cultural context
- Start with the problem
- Describe the expected impact—emphasize what will become possible that was not possible before
- Ensure each section flows neatly into the next



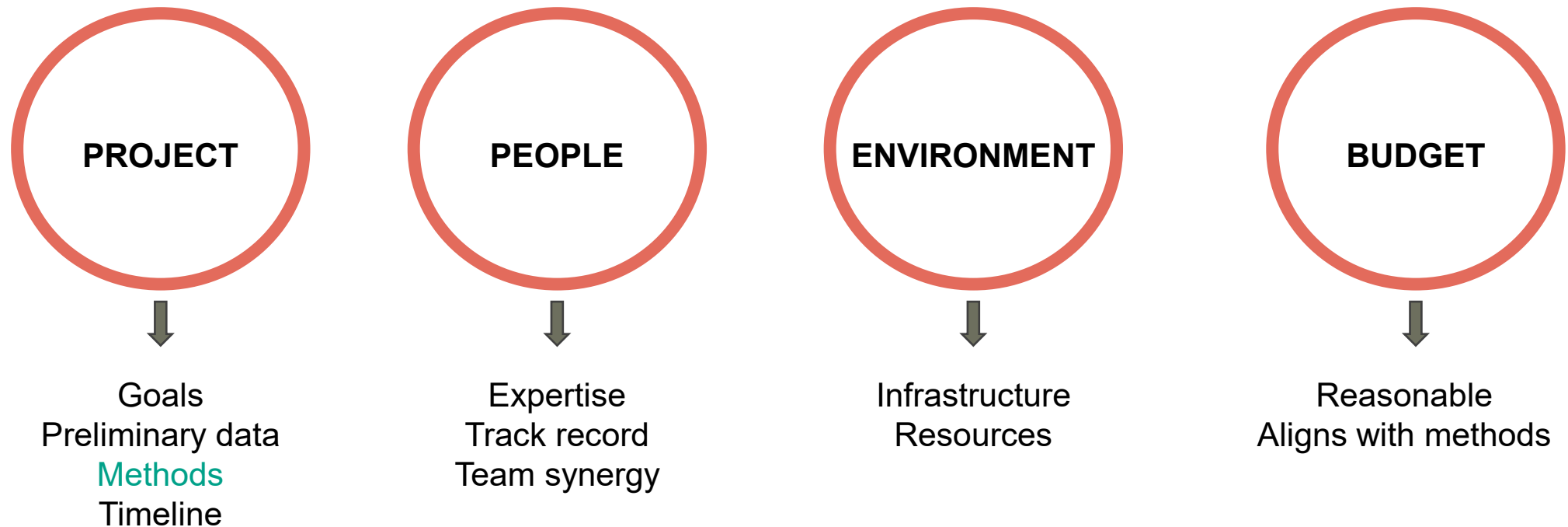
Persuade the reviewer through logic

- Write a proposal that is consistent and coherent
- Place the project in the context of your overall research program
- Point out the connections between your objectives
- Provide rationales for your choices of approach, methods, tools, populations, sample size etc.
- Explain why your approach is better than others
- Ask colleagues to check for inconsistencies in your arguments



Persuade the reviewer through credibility

- Be as specific as possible; back up claims with evidence
- Avoid broad, vague, or generic statements or platitudes (e.g. “Our goal is to conquer cancer...”)
- Be realistic, demonstrate that your plan is feasible (it’s not only about your methods!)



Use formatting to make your proposal easy to read

- Add white space by using bullet points, tables, and figures etc.
- Create sections using headings to help the reviewer navigate your proposal
- Use **bold** (sparingly) to **emphasize** important points, avoid italics, *they are harder to read*

Use the review criteria as your section headings

INTRODUCTION

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas et pellentesque magna. Fusce suscipit vulputate vehicula. Nullam interdum egestas nibh sit amet bibendum. Etiam tempus tincidunt dui venenatis elementum. Suspendisse vulputate vitae est nec finibus. Aenean ullamcorper eros a metus pulvinar sollicitudin. Quisque interdum libero non ante scelerisque, ac pharetra eros faucibus. Duis tempor, lacus at porta maximus, erat est rutrum enim, vulputate vehicula sem metus ac enim. Praesent dapibus nisi eget fringilla posuere. Sed vel sollicitudin tellus. Fusce porta lorem eget ipsum venenatis posuere. Donec vel pellentesque augue. Suspendisse commodo posuere justo, at fermentum erat dapibus sit amet. Cras euismod vehicula orci ut feugiat. Etiam quis finibus erat, in suscipit diam. Pellentesque malesuada accumsan vehicula. Proin id augue suscipit neque efficitur pellentesque. Vivamus ex ligula, maximus a varius in, tristique quis metus. Nam blandit est erat. Vivamus consequat rutrum ipsum, id accumsan ipsum ornare eget. Etiam ac cursus arcu. Morbi facilisis scelerisque neque, a sollicitudin lectus finibus non. Sed varius ante orci, et egestas libero elementum nec. Nunc sed volutpat ipsum. Duis ultricies elit id ipsum tincidunt viverra.

Nam laoreet arcu quis eros luctus, quis maximus diam feugiat. Ut vehicula molestie risus eget consequat. Quisque bibendum sem a felis gravida, sit amet consequat eros tincidunt. Class aptent taciti sociosqu ad litora torquent per conubia nostra, per inceptos himenaeos. Mauris tempor, enim ut bibendum consequat, libero eros posuere turpis, nec bibendum diam tortor vitae lacus. Quisque sodales mattis felis, at posuere lectus eleifend non. Nam ultricies, arcu sit amet tristique vulputate, dui dui blandit nunc, vitae ornare neque tellus vitae arcu. Maecenas auctor urna in justo mollis molestie. Sed pellentesque, risus id congue consectetur, urna urna laoreet risus, vel ultrices neque enim ac turpis. Nulla vel mauris et turpis placerat commodo et consectetur libero. Praesent imperdiet egestas mauris eget ornare.

Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus orci luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia curae; Donec orci diam, ullamcorper sit amet nulla ut, viverra commodo orci. Quisque in venenatis turpis. Quisque metus dolor, ornare eu dui eu, iaculis efficitur nisi. Duis hendrerit orci nec nibh gravida auctor. Vivamus vel tortor quis mi ornare aliquet. Donec blandit purus mi, id lobortis est fermentum id. Phasellus ut nisi nec lacus tempor sollicitudin. Sed semper eget nunc tempus varius. Nullam hendrerit convallis dolor. Suspendisse interdum magna sit amet sodales cursus. Phasellus lobortis odio odio, sit amet aliquet ipsum pretium eu.

Donec quam urna, rhoncus nec purus vitae, blandit egestas metus. Suspendisse in arcu vel tellus eleifend interdum eget nec lacus. Donec mollis viverra felis, egestas convallis tellus ullamcorper et. Mauris nec lobortis leo. Fusce placerat, justo sed congue aliquam, augue urna commodo nunc, eget molestie metus massa vel mauris. Proin fermentum lectus non leo placerat hendrerit. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas et pellentesque magna. Fusce suscipit vulputate vehicula. Nullam interdum egestas nibh sit amet bibendum. Etiam tempus tincidunt dui venenatis elementum. Suspendisse vulputate vitae est nec finibus. Aenean ullamcorper eros a metus pulvinar sollicitudin. Quisque interdum libero non ante scelerisque, ac pharetra eros faucibus. Duis tempor, lacus at porta maximus, erat est rutrum enim, vulputate vehicula sem metus ac enim. Praesent dapibus nisi eget fringilla posuere. Sed vel sollicitudin tellus. Fusce porta lorem eget ipsum venenatis posuere. Donec vel pellentesque augue. Suspendisse commodo posuere justo, at fermentum erat dapibus sit amet. Cras euismod vehicula orci ut feugiat. Etiam quis finibus erat, in suscipit diam.

Pellentesque malesuada accumsan vehicula. Proin id augue suscipit neque efficitur pellentesque. Vivamus ex ligula, maximus a varius in, tristique quis metus. Nam blandit est erat. Vivamus consequat rutrum ipsum, id accumsan ipsum ornare eget. Etiam ac cursus arcu. Morbi facilisis scelerisque neque, a sollicitudin lectus finibus non. Sed varius ante orci, et egestas libero elementum nec. Nunc sed volutpat ipsum. Duis ultricies elit id ipsum tincidunt viverra.

Nam laoreet arcu quis eros luctus, quis maximus diam feugiat. Ut vehicula molestie risus eget consequat. Quisque bibendum sem a felis gravida, sit amet consequat eros tincidunt. Class aptent taciti sociosqu ad litora torquent per conubia nostra, per inceptos himenaeos. Mauris tempor, enim ut bibendum consequat, libero eros posuere turpis, nec bibendum diam tortor vitae lacus. Quisque sodales mattis felis, at posuere lectus eleifend non. Nam ultricies, arcu sit amet tristique vulputate, dui dui blandit nunc, vitae ornare neque tellus vitae arcu. Maecenas auctor urna in justo mollis molestie.

INTRODUCTION

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas et pellentesque magna. Fusce suscipit vulputate vehicula. Nullam interdum egestas nibh sit amet bibendum. Etiam tempus tincidunt dui venenatis elementum. Suspendisse vulputate vitae est nec finibus. Aenean ullamcorper eros a metus pulvinar sollicitudin. Quisque interdum libero non ante scelerisque, ac pharetra eros faucibus. Duis tempor, lacus at porta maximus, erat est rutrum enim, vulputate vehicula sem metus ac enim. Praesent dapibus nisi eget fringilla posuere. Sed vel sollicitudin tellus. Fusce porta lorem eget ipsum venenatis posuere. Donec vel pellentesque augue. Suspendisse commodo posuere justo, at fermentum erat dapibus sit amet. Cras euismod vehicula orci ut feugiat. Etiam quis finibus erat, in suscipit diam. Pellentesque malesuada accumsan vehicula. Proin id augue suscipit neque efficitur pellentesque. Vivamus ex ligula, maximus a varius in, tristique quis metus. Nam blandit est erat. Vivamus consequat rutrum ipsum, id accumsan ipsum ornare eget. Etiam ac cursus arcu. Morbi facilisis scelerisque neque, a sollicitudin lectus finibus non. Sed varius ante orci, et egestas libero elementum nec. Nunc sed volutpat ipsum. Duis ultricies elit id ipsum tincidunt viverra.

1. Suspendisse blandit lorem sit amet semper cursus donec nec justo eu justo bibendum vestibulum
2. Proin pharetra metus in mauris pellentesque ornare
3. Aenean sit amet lectus hendrerit, rhoncus sapien eget, bibendum eros.

1- Nam Laoreet Arcu Quis Eros Luctus

Quis maximus diam feugiat. Ut vehicula molestie risus eget consequat. Quisque bibendum sem a felis gravida, sit amet consequat eros tincidunt. Class aptent taciti sociosqu ad litora torquent per conubia nostra, per inceptos himenaeos. Mauris tempor, enim ut bibendum consequat, libero eros posuere turpis, nec bibendum diam tortor vitae lacus. Quisque sodales mattis felis, at posuere lectus eleifend non. Nam ultricies, arcu sit amet tristique vulputate, dui dui blandit nunc, vitae ornare neque tellus vitae arcu. Maecenas auctor urna in justo mollis molestie. Sed pellentesque, risus id congue consectetur, urna urna laoreet risus, vel ultrices neque enim ac turpis. Nulla vel mauris et turpis placerat commodo et consectetur libero. Praesent imperdiet egestas mauris eget ornare.

Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus orci luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia curae; Donec orci diam, ullamcorper sit amet nulla ut, viverra commodo orci. Quisque in venenatis turpis. Quisque metus dolor, ornare eu dui eu, iaculis efficitur nisi. Duis hendrerit orci nec nibh gravida auctor. Vivamus vel tortor quis mi ornare aliquet. Donec blandit purus mi, id lobortis est fermentum id. Phasellus ut nisi nec lacus tempor sollicitudin. Sed semper eget nunc tempus varius. Nullam hendrerit convallis dolor. Suspendisse interdum magna sit amet sodales cursus. Phasellus lobortis odio odio, sit amet aliquet ipsum pretium eu.



Final tip: Start Early!

- Give yourself time to plan, write, review, and edit
- Take advantage of divisional and central proposal development supports and resources



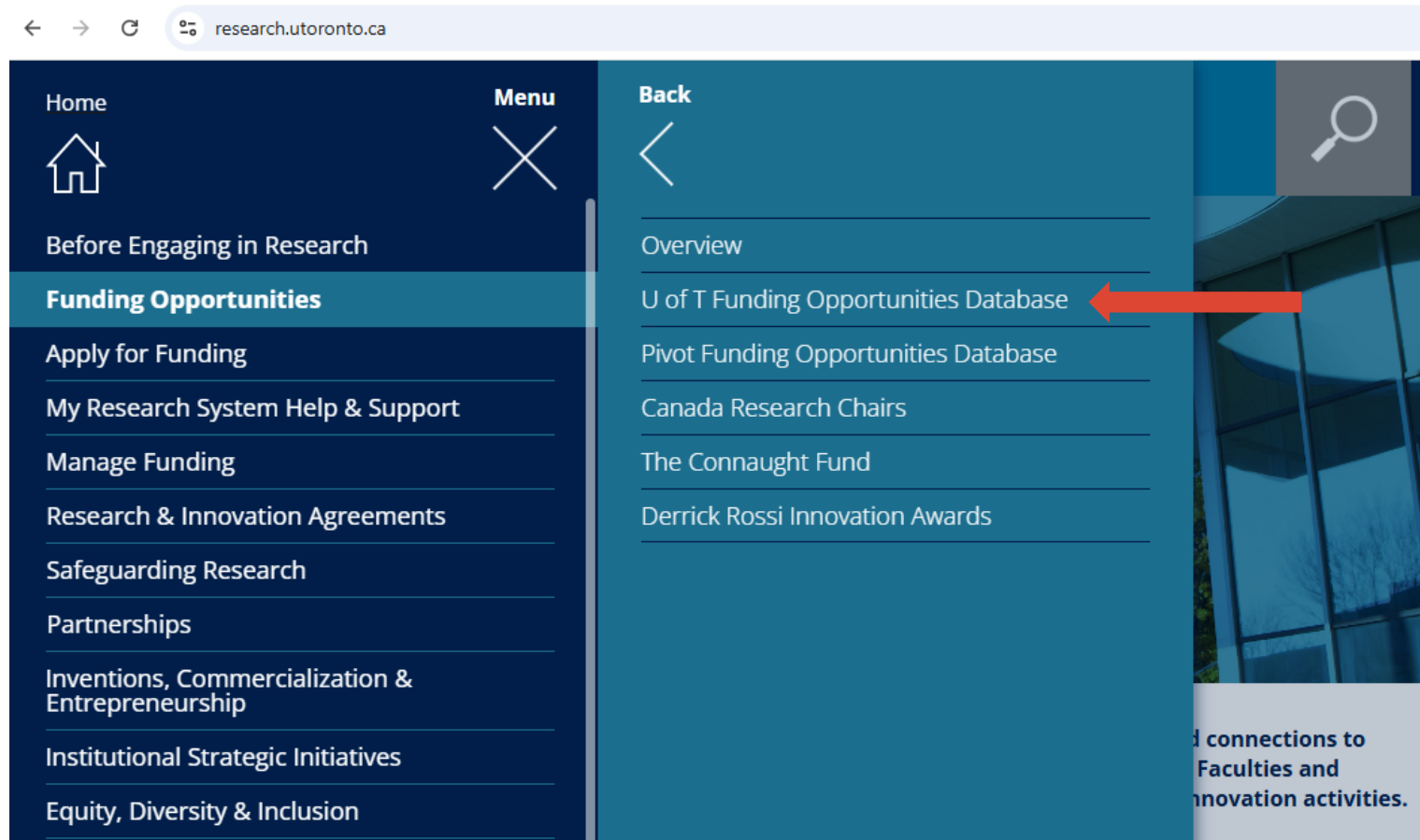
VPRI Proposal Development Supports and Resources



**NOTE: not all supports are available
for all funding opportunities**

Check the: [Funding Opportunities Database](#)

Check the Funding Opportunity's page for available supports



For each funding opportunity:

- Process, deadlines, and available VPRI supports
- Link to sponsor pages and webinars
- VPRI information sessions and workshops
- Link to proposal development guides (e.g. Tip sheet, EDI handbook etc.)

Divisional Contacts

Division	Contact
Applied Science & Engineering	Myriam Couturier (myriam.couturier@utoronto.ca)
Architecture	Shirley Chan (shirley.chan@daniels.utoronto.ca)
Arts & Science	https://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/about/office-dean/key-contacts#research
Dentistry	Farah Thong (farah.thong@dentistry.utoronto.ca)
Education	Madeleine Taylor (madeleinem.taylor@utoronto.ca)
Information	Emina Veletanlic (emina.veletanlic@utoronto.ca)
Kinesiology & Physical Education	Kay Li (kay.li@utoronto.ca)
Law	Kelly Nolan (kelly.nolan@utoronto.ca)
Management	Joanne Pereira (joannep.pereira@rotman.utoronto.ca)
Medicine	https://rhse.temertymedicine.utoronto.ca/grant-development-supports
Music	Ely Lyonblum (eli.lyonblum@utoronto.ca)
Nursing	Shefali Ram (s.ram@utoronto.ca)
Pharmacy	Lia Cardarelli (lia.cardarelli@utoronto.ca)
Public Health	https://www.dlsph.utoronto.ca/research/services-for-researchers/
Social Work	Sean Kinnear (sean.kinnear@utoronto.ca)
UTM	Shaun Young (shaun.young@utoronto.ca)
UTSC	Sean Lockwood (sean.lockwood@utoronto.ca)