



Cancer  
Research Society

# **DOCTORAL RESEARCH AWARDS 2026 Competition**

## **Program Guidelines**

Effective February 25, 2026 – September 1, 2026

This document was last updated February 25, 2026

## **CONTENTS**

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION	2
ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS	3
CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT	4
HOW TO APPLY	4
REVIEW PROCESS	8
REPORTING REQUIREMENTS	8
CONTACT INFORMATION	8

## 1. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Cancer Research Society (CRS) is proud to support graduate students who are pursuing a doctoral degree in cancer-related research in a Canadian institution. The Doctoral Research Award (DRA) provides funding of **\$35,000 per year for a maximum of 2 years, totaling \$70,000**. Doctoral Research Awards are **non-renewable**.

### Key Dates

Call for proposals	February 25, 2026
<b>Application submission deadline</b>	<b>April 29, 2026, 11:59 PM (ET)</b>
Review process completed	August 2026
Award start date	September 2026

### Funding

- **Start date:** September 1, 2026
- **Funding cycle:** September 1 to August 31.
  - Each funding year, payments are made to the grantee's institution in two installments (December and June).
  - December payment covers eligible expenses from September 1 to December 31, and June payment covers eligible expenses from January 1 to August 31.
  - The institution is responsible for administering and disbursing the funds in accordance with its internal policies
- **Overlap:**
  - Grantees are not permitted to hold a second major overlapping award during the term of the CRS Doctoral Research Award.
  - For the purposes of this program, an overlapping award is defined as any **other major award exceeding \$15,000 per year**, that is active at any time during the two-year CRS funding period.
  - Grantees may, however, hold tuition scholarships, receive remuneration for other work (e.g., teaching duties), or receive salary/stipend supplements at the discretion of their supervisor or institution.
  - Please contact CRS at [grants@src-crs.ca](mailto:grants@src-crs.ca) if you have any questions regarding your eligibility.
- Transfer of the CRS Doctoral Research Award to another supervisor or institution is discouraged. CRS reserves the right to approve or deny a transfer request.

## 2. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

### Applicant

- Must be a Canadian citizen, permanent resident or hold a valid student permit and must be residing in Canada for the entire period of the award. Proof of status is required.

- Must have completed at least 12 months of full-time study but no more than 36 months\* in a Canadian university doctoral program on September 1<sup>st</sup>
- The training **MUST** be carried out in a Canadian university or eligible Canadian research institution.

\* Applicants whose doctoral training has been delayed due to extenuating circumstances (parental leave, illness, moves) are invited to contact CRS to determine their eligibility.

## Fast track and joint programs

The DRA program supports trainees conducting cancer-related research in Canada. To be eligible, applicants must have completed **12–36 months of full-time, cancer-related graduate research at a Canadian institution** as of September 1, 2026.

If you transitioned directly from a Master’s to a PhD (fast-track), you **may count your Master’s research months toward the 12-month minimum**, but only if:

- Your PhD project is a direct continuation of your Master’s research, **and**
- There was **no break** between your Master’s and PhD.

**Tip:** If you’ve already completed 12 months of full-time PhD research, do **not** count your Master’s months, your total cannot exceed 36 months.

## What you must provide

To be considered a fast-track applicant, you need **both**:

1. **Official confirmation** by April 29, 2026, such as a transcript note or letter from your supervisor/graduate studies office confirming:
  - Fast-track transition
  - Dates of your Master’s and PhD research
  - Continuity of research
2. **CV notation** clearly showing:
  - Start and end dates for both programs
  - A clear “fast-track” label

Applications **missing either** the official documentation or the CV notation will be deemed incomplete and **administratively triaged**.

## **Project**

### **The following cancer research areas are eligible:**

- Fundamental and basic research;
- Early translational research, including preclinical research, i.e. before a treatment is brought to a patient, including, for example, cellular or animal models, biomarkers for diagnostics and prognosis, and imaging;
- Research studying the environmental causes of cancer including viruses, pollutants, work environment, lifestyle and diet.

### **Non-eligible research areas**

- Clinical trials;
- Applied research focused primarily on the development or improvement of tools such as instruments, medical devices, software, questionnaires, information tools, patient registries, biobanks, tissue microarray (TMA) collections, etc.;
- Psychosocial, social, or socio-economic studies, including research related to cancer prevention and survivorship;
- Health economics or studies aimed at measuring health system utilization or costs;
- Any other type of research that does not fall within the eligible cancer research areas listed above.

Please contact us at [grants@src-crs.ca](mailto:grants@src-crs.ca) should you have doubts about the eligibility of your project.

## **3. CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT**

Eligible applications will be evaluated and scored independently by 2-3 expert and impartial reviewers, based on the following categories:

### **1. Candidate Excellence:**

- a) Motivation Letter: Applicant must show a strong interest, enthusiasm and commitment to cancer research, and demonstrate the ability and determination to pursue a research career in their domain of interest. Clear emphasis on all points is reinforced with examples of the experience gained through work, activities and achievements.
- b) Research Experience and Aptitudes: Applicants should provide a comprehensive overview of their research experiences and internships, including the skills, competencies, and knowledge gained in cancer research. This should encompass publications, presentations and conference participation and all aptitudes and skills obtained throughout their academic, personal and professional experience. Applicants must demonstrate their ability and commitment to pursuing a career in cancer research, with a clear focus on developing the necessary skills to become an independent principal investigator.

## 2. Project and Grantsmanship

- a) Project description: Rationale, clarity of the objectives, techniques, applicant's role and contribution to the overall project
- b) Grantsmanship: Overall quality and writing style (clear, concise, organized and attention to orthography). Consistent formatting should be maintained throughout the document.
- c) Supervisor's letter of support: Should include description of research environment, training provided and roles.

## 3. Academic Excellence:

- a) GPA/Grades: Applicant's academic record
- b) Academic distinctions: Applicant's awards, distinctions and scholarships.

## 4. HOW TO APPLY

Applicants must register and submit their application before **11:59PM ET on April 29, 2026** using the online grant management system, CRS Research Portal, ProposalCentral, [click HERE](#). **There will be no appeal for late submissions.**

All information required for the evaluation of the application must be submitted electronically through ProposalCentral. Receipt of the application will be acknowledged by automated email notification.

- **Applications can be submitted in English or French.**
- **Applications sent by email will not be accepted.**

### Application Form Components

The degree of conciseness and clarity can significantly influence the evaluation of the application. Applicants must follow the instructions regarding the number of characters and/or documents to be uploaded and their respective format. Character limit within each section in ProposalCentral is clearly indicated and must also be respected (longer responses will be truncated). Images and figures cannot be added or attached to the proposal application.

### ***Letter of Motivation***

In the letter, applicants are asked to describe their motivation and interest in their current field of cancer research, along with their envisioned career trajectory. They are expected to demonstrate their commitment to pursuing a long-term career in cancer research and outline how they plan to develop the skills necessary to become an independent principal investigator.

Applicants are also encouraged to highlight relevant abilities and experiences, such as previous work, training activities, awards, or achievements, and explain how these experiences have prepared them for the proposed research project and support their suitability to carry it out.

### ***Project Description***

Provide a detailed, concise project proposal covering the whole period of the award. The proposal should include background, rationale, and a description of the theoretical and experimental approaches that will be taken and explain how these are feasible in the context of the host laboratory (i.e. expertise, collaborations, available equipment, adequate facilities etc.). The project is to be written in the context of current research in the field, which should be referenced accordingly. The applicant should state how the results gathered from their project will impact the cancer research field. The applicant must also clearly explain their role in the project progression and their contributions to the lab.

### ***Expert Review Areas***

Applicants must select their first and second choice among the 5 expert review areas, based on the research area and topic of their proposal. The second choice must differ from the first. Please refer to Appendix B for a description of the areas of expertise.

### ***Research Focus and Potential Partner Support***

CRS may work with partners to co-fund research in specific cancer types or areas. Indicating the research areas relevant to your proposal does not constitute an application for additional funding; it allows CRS to identify proposals that may be of interest to partners for potential co-funding. **Please refer to Appendix A.**

### ***Letter of support from the supervisor***

The applicant's direct supervisor must provide a letter of support. The applicant's name must be clearly indicated in the subject-line of the letter. The letter should describe the training environment, outline the applicant's responsibilities, and provide an assessment of the applicant's suitability for the award.

**Note:** The supervisor's electronic signature is required for submission. Applicants will need to provide their Supervisor access to the proposal in *section 2 "Enable other users to access this application"* in ProposalCentral. Additional instructions on how to grant access to the Supervisor are included in section 2. Applicants and their supervisor must include their electronic signatures in *section 12 "Print Application & Signature"*.

**Note: The maximum number of applicants per lab/PI per grant year is limited to three (3).**

### ***Transcripts***

Applicants must upload official transcripts as part of their online application. **Transcripts sent by email or mail will not be accepted and will not be reviewed.** To be considered official, transcripts must meet all of the following requirements:

- Bear the signature of the registrar and the institution's stamp
- Be uploaded within the application by the submission deadline on April 29, 2026
- PDF format only
- Documents must not be password-protected or encrypted

- All postsecondary transcripts must be combined into one single PDF document
- The file name must contain applicant's full name and application ID

Failure to comply with any of the transcript submission requirements will result in the application being deemed ineligible and removed from further consideration.

### ***Proof of status to study in Canada***

Applicants must provide a copy of one of the following documents:

- Certificate of Canadian citizenship;
- Birth certificate / copy of an act issued by the proper provincial government authority;
- Valid passport;
- Permanent resident card;
- Valid Canadian study permit

**If the status is expiring within the first 3 months of the funding period, proof of renewal must be submitted with the application.**

Documents submitted as proof of status to study in Canada will be kept confidential and used solely by CRS staff to determine eligibility. Once eligibility has been confirmed, these documents will be permanently deleted.

### ***Applicant's CV***

**Present your academic training as follows:**

<b>Degree</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Start Date</b>	<b>End Date</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Bachelor	University of Laval	Cell Bio	Fall 2010	March 2014	
Master	University of Toronto	Nutrition	2015	2016	Fast track
PhD	University of Toronto	Cancer Research	2016	2026	Maternity leave (2017-2018)

The table must clearly include Degree/Diploma type, institution name, program name, start and end dates (or expected end date). The "Notes" column is for applicants to include comments such as fast-track and interruptions (maternity leave, illness, moves, etc). \* **Applicants must provide a letter confirming their fast-track status; and this should also be clearly referenced in their CV.**

Publications, awards, presentations, conferences, volunteering, internships/research experience should be clearly presented on the CV and listed chronologically.

**Note:**

- CV must NOT include any personal information such as date of birth, applicant’s photo, gender and personal address.
- CV should not exceed more than three (3) pages.
- CV should be written in legible font and colors.

***Applicant’s Awards and Pending Support***

<b>Current or Pending Support</b>	<b>Start Date</b>	<b>End Date</b>	<b>Amount per year (CAD)</b>	<b>Type of funding</b>

The table should clearly include applicant’s current or pending financial support, the period of that funding and the amount. Applicants must specify the type of funding they are receiving (tuition payment, stipend, etc.).

Applicants are responsible for ensuring their application is complete and complies with all program requirements, including submission of all required documents in the prescribed format by the competition deadline. Late, incomplete, or non-compliant applications will be deemed ineligible.

**5. REVIEW PROCESS**

All applications will undergo an initial administrative review. Applications that are incomplete, ineligible, or non-compliant with program requirements (including required documentation and formatting instructions) will be administratively streamlined and excluded from peer review. Applicants will be notified if their application does not proceed to peer review.

Eligible applications will be reviewed **by 2-3 external impartial experts**. To be considered for funding, an application must have received an average **minimum score of 85 out of 100**.

Based on the average scores, CRS will rank the applications and **fund up to 50 applications** that have received a high merit score. Additional awards may be granted if further funding becomes available from CRS or partners.

All applicants, regardless of their score, will be notified of the outcome of their application. Applicants will have access to the reviewers’ comments through ProposalCentral. If an applicant declines the award, CRS may offer the award to the next meritorious applicant on the list. **All CRS decisions are final.**

## 6. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Awardees must submit annual statements of accounts and a final award report at the end of the funding period. CRS will provide instructions on completing the reports via our online grant management system. Failure to submit the required reports will result in the future payments of the award being withheld.

Additional information regarding reporting will be provided in the Research Funding Agreements to the grantees.

## 7. CONTACT INFORMATION

For questions regarding the **2026 Doctoral Research Award Competition**, contact the Cancer Research Society at [grants@src-crs.ca](mailto:grants@src-crs.ca).

For questions regarding ProposalCentral, contact Customer Support Monday through Friday 8:30am - 5:00pm (ET) by e-mail at [pcsupport@altum.com](mailto:pcsupport@altum.com).

## Appendix A: Research Focus and Potential Partner Support

Indicating your research area helps CRS identify proposals that may be of interest to partner organizations for potential co-funding. This does not increase your grant amount; it simply helps match projects with partners' priorities.

Applicants should:

- Select the relevant research area(s) in ProposalCentral.
- Provide a brief justification (see Section 5), ensuring at least 80% of the project aligns.
- Understand that this information may be shared with partners for co-funding consideration.

CRS retains final decisions on partner co-funding, and opportunities may change as new partnerships are established.

Confirmed Partnerships:



## Appendix B: Expert Review Areas

All DRA applications are reviewed asynchronously by scientists with expertise in the relevant areas of cancer research.

Select your first and second choice of review areas from the 5 listed below (the second must differ from the first). CRS will try to honor your first choice but may assign your application to the area whose expertise best fits your research.

Choosing the right areas ensures your proposal is evaluated by reviewers familiar with your topic.

EXPERT REVIEW AREAS
<p><b>A: Cell/Cell Communication and Tumour Adaptation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Signal transduction</li><li>• Cell/cell communication (including metabolic coupling)</li><li>• Tumour Microenvironment</li><li>• Tumour hypoxia</li><li>• Tumour Metabolism</li><li>• Stress Responses (Plasticity)</li><li>• Post-translational modifications</li><li>• Cell migration, adhesion and chemotaxis</li><li>• Pre-clinical models (non-mammalian)</li></ul>
<p><b>B: Cancer immunology/Pharmacology</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cancer immunology and immunotherapy</li><li>• Chemotherapeutic drug development &amp; pharmacological studies</li><li>• Mechanisms of drug resistance</li><li>• Cells, genes, viruses or viral genes, vaccines as anti-cancer drugs</li><li>• Radiation, radiosensitizers, biomarkers</li><li>• Synthetic Biology and Tissue Engineering</li></ul>
<p><b>C: Tumour suppressor genes, oncogenes and DNA repair</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Transcriptional and translational regulation</li><li>• Tumour suppressor genes and oncogenes</li><li>• Tumour initiation</li><li>• DNA replication (including cell cycle), damage and repair</li><li>• DNA integrity and genomic instability</li><li>• Epigenetic mechanisms</li><li>• Computational analysis of -omics data</li><li>• Stem cells (tumour-initiating cells and cancer stem cells)</li></ul>

**D: Tumor progression and metastasis**

- Cell cultures and animal models
- Identification and validation of novel therapeutic targets
- Tumour angiogenesis
- Metastasis, plasticity and tumor progression models
- Drug and genomic high throughput phenotypic (HTP) screening
- Computational biology, bioinformatics, systems biology, AI

**E: Early translational research and epidemiology**

- Tumour imaging
- Biomarkers discovery and validation
- Diagnostics and prognostic assays
- Epidemiology