

SSHRC IG budget information session – University of Toronto Research Services – Aug 24, 2023

Questions asked in advance of session:

1. What is, if there is any, required percentage of student training in one's budget?

There is no required percentage, it is based on the needs of the project, though keeping in mind that SSHRC does place a value on incorporating student training and mentoring in a proposal (but the work students are to do on the project must be directly related to the project)

2. What's the defining factor to choose IG over IDG?

There is no one deciding factor. The obvious ones are budget and duration, as the IG budget can be significantly greater than what one can request in an IDG, and the IG can also be up to 5 years, where the IDG is only 2. If you are an established scholar, then the IDG has restrictions on the type of project you can propose, as it must be distinct from your previous or ongoing research activities (so must be novel, whereas the IG does not have this restriction for established scholars). And if you are conducting a project with researchers outside of Canada, then the IDG allows for int'l co-applicants, but the IG does not, as the IG only allows those outside of Canada to act as collaborators (and this has an impact in terms of the types of expenses an int'l researcher can incur on an IG, since Collaborator's cannot incur their own research expenses. This sometimes makes the hiring of an int'l RA challenging on an IG).

3. What proportion of the budget is it appropriate to allocate for PhD student training & support?

Same answer as question 1 above. Often, the primary costs one finds in an IG budget will be personnel costs, but there is no proportion that is suggested by SSHRC or the IG guidelines.

4. How much is it reasonable to budget for computer equipment?

There is no strict answer here. Computing equipment is an eligible expense, but must be based on the needs of the project, and what is essential to the project. All computing equipment must be sufficiently justified in the budget justification section.

5. How much is it reasonable to budget for conference travel to present work?

Again, there is no strict answer here. Generally, it has been suggested that one should avoid requesting conference travel expenses in the first year of the grant, but other than that, it would depend on which conferences are the ideal ones to present at (based on the needs of the project), where they will be held, etc. While the applications are being submitted to SSHRC, they are being reviewed by your academic peers. What would you peers think is a reasonable or essential amount of travel based on the needs of your project?

6. How do we decide which funding stream (A vs. B) to apply for?

The distinction between stream A and B is significant, as A is for budgets that are \$100,000 or lower, and B is for budgets above \$100,000 and up to \$400,000. The budget is ultimately based on the needs of the project, which would be determined by the PI but also in cooperation perhaps with their divisional research office, who may have proposal development specialists that the PI can speak to. The difficulty might be for those who are close to the cut off (for example, they are proposing a project with a

\$104,000 budget). We know that SSHRC would like have a higher success rate for stream A applications than stream B (about 5-7% more). So should you change your budget so that you fit into stream A? Will doing so impact the feasibility of your project, which could impact the committee's assessment of your application? However, it's also true that stream B applications do not necessarily fair poorly in this competition (if we take the UofT numbers as an example). Don't sacrifice feasibility just to get under the \$100,000 mark.

7. I am interested in writing in a funding package for a post-doc. What should I keep in mind?

We have heard from previous committee members that requesting funds for a postdoc can be tricky, and it is often dissuaded. You do have to justify really well why a postdoc is needed on the project (eg, why couldn't the same work be done by a doctoral student?). It has to also be clear that you (the Applicant) are the PI of the project, and this is not the postdoc's project (one UofT faculty member, who was also an IG committee member, said that one proposal looked at had the majority of the activities being conducted by the postdoc, so his natural question was "Whose project is this? What is the PI doing on the project?"). Why is a postdoc required? Could the same activities not be conducted by a (for example) doctoral student? Why is a postdoc essential? Think of the people reviewing the application (your academic peers, who have likely also held IGs in the past). If you were in their position, would you be persuaded by your justification as to why a postdoc is necessary?

8. Is it possible to buy out of courses with funding?

No, SSHRC has confirmed that course buyout or teaching release is considered an ineligible expense, so SSHRC IG funds could not be used for that. However, if the university is willing to offer teaching release to you for the benefit of your IG project, then that is something that can be included in the "Funds from other sources" section of the IG application.

9. Are there salary guidelines that should be used for students or others?

For questions related to rates of pay for RAs or other personnel to be employed on the project, it is best to speak to your dept or divisional business officer.

10. What are the criteria used to determine whether a budget is reasonable?

Mostly it would depend on how well you justify the budget, how the budget you present is naturally informed by the other parts of the application (including methodology, KM plan, student training), and all costs are justified in such a way that they show they are essential to the project. SSHRC has a manual for merit review committee members which is publicly available, and does give some insight about how budgets are evaluated: https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/merit_review_evaluation_du_merite/adjudication_manual-guide_comite_selection-eng.aspx#6.

11. Can international co-applicants support a grad student?

International co-applicants are not allowed on an IG. Int'l researchers can only be included as collaborators on an IG (based on SSHRC's IG guidelines). This impacts the types of expenses int'l researchers can incur, as collaborators cannot incur their own research expenses. Additionally, we are not allowed to subgrant IG funds to a collaborator. There is no rule on SSHRC's end that says you cannot hire an int'l RA, but the expense for that RA could not be for the collaborator. Instead, it has to be for the PI and the project as a whole. You would have to speak to your dept BO about this, as we have seen

some recent examples that have shown it can be challenging to hire an int'l RA, especially if that RA works under the supervision of an int'l collaborator on an IG.

12. As someone in engineering education who conducts social science research, but funds students on the engineering model, can I put in line items for grad students (the cost for engineering students)?

RA and student costs can be incorporated in the budget, but you must show that they will be doing meaningful work on the project, so they are being paid for the work they are doing that is directly related to the IG project in order to help reach the project objectives.

13. If we have a collaborator (not co-applicant) abroad, can we budget for covering the cost to bring them to Canada for a period of time to work on the project? In our case we have a collaborator based in Zimbabwe.

Collaborators cannot incur research costs on SSHRC grants. However, as per IG guidelines, their travel and subsistence expenses related to research planning, the exchange of information with the grantee, and for the dissemination of research results are considered eligible. So if the travel the collaborator is undertaking falls under these kinds of reasons for the travel, then yes, their travel costs can be covered by the IG funds. However, you cannot cover the travel costs for a collaborator if it is for the conduct of research activities (such as data collection efforts).

14. I might want to try to hire a post-doc with computational (big text data) skills for a project if it gets funded because I do not have much of those skills. Those kinds of people are hard to get and expensive. How can I make a convincing case that I can be successful in that in the budget justification?

If you know of any other faculty members at UofT who have successfully applied for a SSHRC grant with postdoc expenses in their budget, then it would be good to talk to them. If it will be a challenge to find someone with those skills, then is it worth mentioning a contingency plan? (perhaps speak to your divisional research office and its proposal development officer about this). Can doctoral students do similar work? As the PI, you need to be able to show that you are in a position to successfully carry out the project. If the skills you are suggesting are essential to the successful completion of the project, but you don't have those skills, then you need to show that you will be able to hire someone who can (while at the same time showing that you are the PI on the grant, and it is not a project that will be primarily completed by a postdoc). Additionally, if a postdoc is to be paid from the grant funds, then the postdoc could not be included as a collaborator on the grant.

15. For quantitative proposals a lot of the budget is determined by needs for statistical power, since that determines sample size. Is there anyone at UofT who can help applicants develop a discussion of statistical power issues and help develop estimates?

Apologies, we are not sure, as this is more of a proposal development or business office-related question. It would be best to speak to your divisional research facilitator.

16. Can post-doctoral fellows (who already have some funding) have additional source of funding written into the proposal if they are part of the project?

Postdoc fellows can be paid from the grant for the work they are doing that is directly related to the project. However, as stated previously, if postdoc costs are included in the budget, it must be strongly justified, and the work that they are doing must be commensurate with their level of education. Also, it's important to note that if they are being paid from the grant, they cannot be listed as a collaborator on the grant. And finally, it may also depend on the type of award they already hold. For example, if the postdoc already holds a SSHRC postdoc fellowship, then SSHRC doesn't place any restrictions on outside sources of funding or employment, but there may be UofT institutional regulations that might apply (so they would have to speak to the postdoc office at SGS or their respective contact at their dept or faculty), and they are also obliged to devote full-time hours to the research or studies for which they were awarded the SSHRC postdoc fellowship funding.

17. How much travel funding is appropriate for a comparative project of different countries?

My apologies, there is no real right answer here, it would depend on the project. If the research activities are taking place in another country, then one can imagine that the travel costs could reasonably be higher than another project that is being conducted locally or domestically. You ultimately just have to show that you have thought out the essential travel costs, and that all the travel you are including in your budget is required to undertake and complete the project. It might be a good idea to share your budget with another researcher in your dept/faculty (perhaps someone who has held their own SSHRC grant) to get their take on your proposed budget.

18. PhD Flex-time students are also eligible to apply for SSHRC?

A PhD student can apply for an IG directly to SSHRC (you cannot apply through UofT, as you don't meet UofT's eligibility criteria to act as PI on a grant, so you would leave the "Administering Organization" section of the IG application blank). However, if the IG is awarded, you would have to have completed your PhD before the grant is awarded (in April 2024), and you would also have to establish a formal affiliation with a SSHRC eligible Canadian institution by Sept 2024 in order for SSHRC to award the grant to you (basically, you would need a faculty appointment of some kind in order to actually hold the grant).

19. How can elders/knowledge keepers be fairly compensated?

My apologies, this is a much larger discussion, and it's difficult to answer this, as it may depend on conversations you have with the indigenous community and the elders, or conversations with other researchers who have done similar activities, but also may be based on guidelines at UofT, specifically those through Financial Services, so you could perhaps speak to your BO about this to see if there are any institutional guidelines you should be aware of (especially if there is a maximum amount that one can offer in terms of cash honorariums).

20. Where can we find out the costs of different items (e.g. student researcher salaries, etc.?)

You would have to speak to your dept or divisional business office.

21. If most of our interviews are on zoom, what are some other costs related to conducting qualitative interviews?

Honorarium or participant fee costs? Perhaps you should speak to your divisional research facilitator or other colleagues who may have an idea of what other costs there may be.

22. How to best adapt budget from unsuccessful IDG grant please?

Generally speaking, the costs from an IDG proposal could be the same for an IG proposal. The difference will be with any co-applicant costs: if your IDG had int'l co-applicants, and you included their research costs in the budget, then those same kinds of research costs could not be included, as int'l co-applicants are not allowed on an IG. Might be best to speak to your divisional research facilitator about this.

23. How to include payment for research assistants abroad (partner university)?

It just needs to be sufficiently justified. Why is it necessary to have an RA outside of Canada? If it is to have someone already on the ground where the research is taking place, then that could make sense. However, since int'l co-applicants are not allowed on an IG, how that RA may be paid could be challenging, so you should speak to your business officer about this, as we are not allowed to subgrant any of the IG funds to a collaborator at the partner institution (so it has been suggested that an int'l RA would have to be employed through an employment contract, but that would be based on institutional guidelines through UofT financial services or procurement. However, that is not exactly clear to us at RSO, so best to speak to your business officer).

24. What format is best for presenting your budget?

There is no set-upon format. The budget (that is, the straight numbers) are entered in a budget table called "Funds requested from SSHRC". Then, you need to draft a 2-page budget justification document where you justify all the expenses you've included in that budget table. The budget justification document must follow certain basic formatting guidelines (PDF, 12 pt times new roman font, ¾" margins), but other than that, it must be presented clearly. Ideally, one should take the budget categories from the budget table, and organize the budget justification document with those budget categories in mind (so that the committee can see how the two are connected, and it makes it easier to read). Additionally, the budget table has only one section for travel expenses, but the IG instructions say that for the budget justification document, you have to distinguish between the costs for travel for research purposes, and the costs for travel for communication purposes (eg, conference travel).

25. Are there ethical fee standards for honorarium fees for equity deserving groups participating in research projects?

My apologies, but this is not something we can effectively answer. There is a webpage on the UofT research and innovation website that talks about the "Compensation & Reimbursement of Research Participants" (<https://research.utoronto.ca/compensation-reimbursement-research-participants>), and it does talk about it from an ethical point of view, but not necessarily related to honorarium fees for equity deserving groups. This may be something that you can discuss with your faculty leadership (like Chair, or Faculty dean/research office), or with other faculty members who have done similar kinds of research activities.

26. Is there a resource in which information pertaining to personnel costs across and expertise levels (e.g. undergrad works study student > postdoc) disciplines can be found?

My apologies, not that I know of, but your first stop would be your dept/divisional business officer.

27. What are 'red flag' budget items to avoid? Computer equipment? Travel - types or what years of grant?

Overhead or indirect costs, teaching release, expenses that are not directly related to the project, conference travel costs in year 1, computers or equipment without sufficient justification, research expenses for collaborators, payments to the applicant, co-apps or collaborators, fees for presenters or guest speakers, payments to a faculty member based in Canada.

28. Can an Adjunct faculty member at UofT apply as the PI on an Insight Grant to be administered at UofT?

Unfortunately no, as per the UofT PI guidelines (developed by the UofT Vice Provost office), adjunct faculty members may only act as co-applicants on an application that is submitted by another faculty member at UofT who is eligible to be PI. This is what it says in the UofT Academic Administrative Procedures Manual:

“Adjunct appointees may not be the principal investigator on research funds administered by the University, but may be a co-investigator on a grant held by a full-time or Status-Only faculty member at the University of Toronto.”

(from <https://www.aapm.utoronto.ca/academic-administrative-procedures-manual/other-appointments/status-only-adjunct-visiting-professors/#adjunct>)

29. Are carbon offsets an eligible expense?

Yes, this is what it says in the Tri-Agency Guide to Financial Administration:

“As part of the Greening Government Strategy, travel expenditures may include the cost of carbon offset credits. Please refer to the Tri-agency carbon offset statement.”

The statement it refers to says the following:

“The Government of Canada recognizes the importance of decreasing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in order to reduce the negative impacts of climate change on Canada and globally. In this context, the agencies encourage grant recipients to consider the necessity of grant-funded travel, and to reduce this when possible. When grant-funded travel is necessary for the research activities, the agencies encourage grant recipients to use lower-carbon forms of transportation to help reduce GHG emissions. The agencies consider carbon offset costs (related to air travel or other transportation) to be an appropriate use of grant funds for research/activities that are aligned with the principles and directives of the Tri-agency Guide on Financial Administration.”

(from https://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/interagency-interorganismes/TAFA-AFTO/guide-guide_eng.asp#fn1)

However, there are UofT institutional guidelines concerning this as well, so you should be aware of them. From what we understand, the carbon offset fee is not charged for research funds and if the PI gets charged they would just need to contact their FAST team rep to get it credited back to them. This information can be found at the UofT Financial Services website:

<https://finance.utoronto.ca/knowledgecentre/are-research-grants-or-other-funds-charged-the-carbon-offset-fee/>. However, you should speak to your Business Officer to see what this means in practice.