

Terms of Reference: 2021 ALS Canada Career Transition Award

Overview

The vision of ALS Canada is “a future without ALS.” To build momentum for continued pursuance of new treatments and a better understanding of the disease through the end of the decade and beyond, it is imperative that promising young investigators are nurtured into a career focused on ALS research. This program will identify and engage rising stars pursuing innovative research in labs and academic institutions in Canada. This award has the long-term goal of developing the next generation of scientists across various disciplines within basic and clinical sciences, contributing to knowledge generation and translation in ALS.

To fulfil this mission, ALS Canada will provide a three (3) year award to support talented young investigators to pursue advanced postdoctoral training and transition into a junior faculty position at a Canadian institution. The postdoctoral portion may be carried out in the individual’s current institution or another institution approved by ALS Canada and is not restricted to Canada. The expectation is that this additional training will allow award recipients to increase their knowledge and skills, thereby enhancing continuation of their career in ALS-related research and improving their competitiveness for a junior faculty position in Canada. Successful candidates will expand their research horizons and develop independence to become a leader in the field in a manner that sets them apart from their mentor(s).

Funding

Awards will be for up to three (3) years. Each year, ALS Canada will provide \$60,000 salary and \$20,000 research allowance with \$30,000 for research allowance in year three. Year two funding will be dependent on a progress interview with an expert panel at the ALS Canada Research Forum. Recipients will not be formally re-reviewed, but activity and progress towards seeking and achieving an independent position will be assessed to consider second year funding. Progress interviews will largely be considered for guidance and support, but recommendations to halt funding are possible if a recipient no longer demonstrates promise in achieving an independent position. A year two budget and progress report will be provided two weeks in advance of the interview.

Year three funding will begin upon achieving an independent position at a Canadian institution. This may be deferred for up to one year to allow for additional time in securing a position. The intent of year three funding is to provide modest incentive for competitive hiring. If an independent position is achieved in the first two years, the remainder of the three-year award will be provided to the recipient as junior faculty. Under extenuating circumstances, ALS Canada would be willing to provide additional deferral, but such instances will be handled on a case-by-case basis with review of the recipient’s current track towards independence.

Eligibility

The intent of this award is for ALS Canada to support a promising senior postdoc or Research Associate to transition into an independent position contributing to ALS research. The applicant must have a PhD. Applicants with an MD need to state a strong case for pursuing a career in research, with significant protected time and explain why the Clinical Research Fellowship is not the appropriate avenue to seek ALS Canada support. Citizens and permanent residents of Canada working anywhere as well as foreign citizens working within Canada are eligible to apply. The postdoctoral applicant will have demonstrated contributions to research which may or may not have related directly to ALS but proposed future training must be ALS-related. The applicant, either at the postdoctoral or Research Associate level, must demonstrate clear evidence of independent research, showing intellectual contributions to research through his/her publication and presentation record.

Terms of Reference: 2021 ALS Canada Career Transition Award

Application Process

Complete applications should be submitted via e-mail to the ALS Canada Research Team (research@als.ca). Applications will be accepted until 1 pm EST on September 28th, 2021. Applications should request delivery and read receipts. An email acknowledging receipt of the application will be sent.

- **Format:** Applications must be prepared as a single PDF file using standard type fonts (Arial-11 or Times Roman-12) with 0.5"/1.27 cm margins and numbered pages.
- **Required Documents:** Please submit your application for review in the following order:
 - Signed and completed cover page (template provided)
 - Letter from the applicant (limit 2 pages) (see format*)
 - Letter from the proposed mentor outlining the professional development plan (limit 2 pages – sent directly to research@als.ca) (see format**)
 - Scientific summary/abstract (limit ½ page)
 - Research Plan (see format***; limit 3 pages excluding bibliography, plus one page of figures/tables)
 - Budget for first year research allowance (Year 2 budget to be provided at progress interview – see eligible and ineligible expenses ****)
 - Curriculum Vitae of the applicant (see format*****)
 - Curriculum Vitae of the proposed supervisor (NIH style biosketch; see format*****)
 - Letter of support from another faculty member familiar with the applicant (limit 2 pages) – sent directly to research@als.ca
 - Letter of support from an additional, recognized faculty member attesting to the quality of the applicant's work and potential to impact the field as a PI (limit 2 pages) – sent directly to research@als.ca.
- **Year Three Funding:** Funding at the faculty level is contingent upon receipt of:
 - Letter of offer from the institution where the faculty position will be held
 - Report indicating successes leading to faculty position (limit 2 pages)

***Applicant's Letter:**

The letter is the applicant's opportunity to explain to the reviewers why he/she should be chosen.

Suggested material includes, but is not limited to:

- Previous training and how it relates to the present proposal
- Research goals
- Career goals
- Importance of the research proposal to the field of ALS research and ALS Canada's vision

**** Mentor Letter**

The letter is the supervisor/mentor's opportunity to explain to the reviewers why the applicant should be chosen. Suggested material includes, but is not limited to:

- Research support available
- Applicant's qualifications and potential for independent research career
- Institutional commitment

Terms of Reference: 2021 ALS Canada Career Transition Award

*****Research Plan:**

The research plan must not exceed 3 pages in length and should include the following information:

- Rationale for the project, including hypothesis
- Specific aims
- Background: A comprehensive literature review is not expected. Please supply only the information that is required for reviewers who are specialists in ALS and neurodegenerative disease to understand the proposal.
- Preliminary data
- Experimental Plan: A clear and logical experimental plan that addresses the hypothesis and specific aims.
- Bibliography (Include titles and all authors of the referenced articles; excluded from page limit).
- Supporting figures/tables (limit 1 page)

******Budget Allowances:**

The budgetary allowance is intended to directly support the recipient's work outlined in the application and aimed at a path to independence from the mentor. Funds should not be used to support the mentor's lab and should be limited to lab supplies, fees for outsourced services and travel (up to \$2000 CAD per year). For any other items, sufficient justification must be made, outlining the necessity of the purchase for the path to independence. For questions about the eligibility of specific expenses please contact research@als.ca

Unauthorized expenses include:

- Personnel
- Equipment
- Any indirect costs including salaries or benefits to anyone other than the awardee, host laboratory overhead costs, etc.
- Insurance fees
- Purchase or rental of office equipment (laptop excepted – maximum \$1500)
- Membership or subscription dues
- Moving costs

*******CV:**

Applicants' CVs should include the following sections: Education and Training, Positions and Honours, Professional Activities and Awards, Peer-reviewed Publications and Poster/Oral Presentations. For all multi-authored publications, a detailed indication of the applicant's contribution should be provided. No page limits.

Mentors' CVs should take the form of an NIH-style biosketch, including the following sections: Education and Training, Positions and Honours, Research Focus (one paragraph), Professional Activities and Awards, Peer-reviewed Publications relevant to the proposal, and Research Funding (last five years). Budgetary overlap for the project with other funding provided by ALS Canada or another agency must be disclosed. Maximum 4 pages.

Terms of Reference: 2021 ALS Canada Career Transition Award

Evaluation

Applications will be reviewed by a panel consisting of members chosen from any of the following groups;

- not-in-conflict members of the Scientific & Medical Advisory Council (SMAC) of ALS Canada
- international ALS research experts
- additional members of the Canadian ALS research community
- non-ALS researchers with relevant expertise

Applications will first be reviewed and scored in written form, followed by an initial teleconference or online discussion between review panel members to determine finalists for interview. Finalists will be notified and interviewed by the evaluation panel at the ALS Canada Research Forum, followed by a confidential, live panel discussion and scoring process.

Recommendations for funding will be based on potential to contribute to the Canadian ALS research community. Reviewers will consider the merit of the applicant, the quality of the proposed future work and work to date, and the relevance of the work to ALS. Likelihood for success in obtaining or maintaining a faculty position will be strongly considered in the decision. Written feedback will be provided to the applicant from each reviewer, and from the panel discussion.

Conditions of the Award

- 1) Release of funds will be subject to receipt of relevant ethics approvals from the supervising PI's institutional review committees, where necessary (for use of human subjects, research animals, or hazardous materials). Note, the PI will be responsible for ensuring that relevant ethics approvals have been obtained at each participating institution. Changes in research aims or budget allocation requires *a priori* permission of ALS Canada.
- 2) Funds will be sent as quarterly instalments to the supervising PI's institution (Institution paid) or recipient's institution for junior faculty portion. Any unused portions must be returned to ALS Canada. ALS Canada awards do not cover indirect costs at recipient institutions.
- 3) Annual progress reports are required on March 31st for each year of the award. A final progress report is due within four weeks of termination of the grant. A template will be provided by ALS Canada upon acceptance of the award.
- 4) Funding is contingent upon compliance with the policies of ALS Canada.
- 5) Budgetary overlap for the project with other funding provided by ALS Canada or another agency must be disclosed.
- 6) The intent of these grants is to fund research that will be in the open domain. All manuscripts, presentations, abstracts, etc. must acknowledge funding by ALS Canada. Grantees should make every effort to publish all findings related to the project and to acknowledge ALS Canada in media events discussing research funded by ALS Canada. Manuscripts or other presentations in press must be sent to the Vice President, Research of ALS Canada upon acceptance for publication. ALS Canada should also be notified as soon as possible of media events related to the project.
- 7) Awardees are required to inform the Vice President, Research of ALS Canada, of significant difficulties, availability of resources, additional funding sources, or changes to the experimental plan throughout the term of the grant.

Terms of Reference: 2021 ALS Canada Career Transition Award

- 8) For the purposes of advocating the mission of ALS Canada, it is expected that ALS Canada funded researchers will actively engage with, or on behalf of, ALS Canada when requested.
- 9) Funded researchers will be expected to attend the annual ALS Canada Research Forum as a sponsored invitee and will be encouraged to present their project upon request.

Questions and Additional Information

David Taylor, PhD
Vice President, Research
ALS Canada
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Toronto, ON M5G 1E6
Email: research@als.ca
Tel: 416-497-2267 ext 202

Important Dates

- Call announced August 3, 2021
- Application deadline September 28, 2021
- Announcement of award November 2021
- Earliest funding start date December 2021