

Strengthening Canada's Skills with PIAAC Research

Call for Proposals

Released November 2025



Introduction

The Future Skills Centre is a pan-Canadian organization that supports new approaches to addressing Canada's most pressing labour market development issues. We work with a diverse network of partners from coast to coast to coast to invest in solutions, generate insights, and catalyze systems change to advance a future of shared prosperity where no one is left behind. With the release of Cycle 2 of [OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies \(PIAAC\)](#), Canada has a unique opportunity to deepen its understanding of adult skills and their role in driving prosperity and well-being. PIAAC is a rich dataset that sheds light on both the distribution of foundational skills and the ways in which these skills influence labour market outcomes, productivity, social participation, and quality of life.

This competitive open call for proposals is designed to unlock the potential of PIAAC data for Canada. We aim to fund innovative, policy-relevant research projects that address critical gaps in evidence, build national research capacity, and mobilize findings in ways that will inform policies, programs, and practices.

This call builds upon FSC's recent scoping paper, [Skills for Productivity, Prosperity and Well-being in Canada](#), which discusses key knowledge gaps, the importance of fostering research infrastructure and networks and mentoring the next generation of researchers, and ensuring that evidence reaches those in a position to act on it. All interested applicants are strongly encouraged to review the scoping paper prior to developing their submission to this funding call.



Call Overview

Through this investment stream, FSC will support up to ten research projects to be carried out between **April and October 2026**. Projects are expected to deliver timely, high-quality evidence aligned with three interrelated objectives:

- Closing knowledge gaps through PIAAC analysis by addressing research priorities as set out by FSC and the related research questions:
 - **Skills as drivers:** Demonstrating the economic and social returns to foundational skills:
 1. What can we learn from PIAAC about how skills contribute to productivity and economic performance? What can we learn that would help policymakers and practitioners use skills-related policies and strategies to address these key concerns in the Canadian economy more effectively?
 2. What can we learn from PIAAC about the exact nature and strength of the relationship between skills proficiency and labor market economies?
 3. What is the relationship among skills proficiencies and personal and social well-being-including health, trust, political engagement and efficiency, and volunteerism?
 - **Skills as outcomes:** Understanding the mechanisms of skills development, retention, and loss, particularly for equity-deserving groups.
 4. Building on the research conducted on Cycle 1 data, how do Canadian adults perform on skills? What has changed and which jurisdictions perform especially well (or poorly) and thereby could serve as candidates for best practice assessments?
 5. What explains Canadian adults' skill proficiency? What are the mechanisms by which skills are developed, retained, and lost?
 6. How can we improve Canada's adult skills performance? What are the potential policy, program, and strategy interventions to improve skills?
- Proposals may also choose to address research questions beyond the six listed above. In such cases, they must explain how these questions align with at least one of the two PIAAC research priorities as set out by FSC and how answering them will contribute to this research program's intended outcomes.
- Strengthening research infrastructure and capacity for using PIAAC data by creating opportunities for collaboration among researchers, facilitating methodological exchange, and mentoring junior researchers in the use of complex survey data.



- Enhancing policy and practice impact of PIAAC results by ensuring that findings are mobilized in formats accessible to both technical and non-technical audiences, enabling decision-makers to design more effective, equity-responsive policies and interventions.

The Future Skills Centre welcomes proposals developed around diverse research methodologies including quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods. However, for this research call we expect all proposals to use and analyze the PIAAC data as a principal line of evidence in the overall research design.

The Future Skills Centre expects all partners to integrate [Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Reconciliation \(EDI&R\)](#) into the design and delivery of research projects. In particular, we encourage project teams to take EDI&R into consideration in areas such as leadership and governance of the project, the composition of the research team, and the design of the research and framing of the research questions, methods, data collection and analysis, and results publication and knowledge dissemination. We encourage projects to include meaningful partnerships or consultations and, where appropriate, providing opportunities for the active participation of people from equity deserving groups - including Indigenous peoples, Black and other racialized people, women, persons with disabilities, neurodiverse people, as well as youth, newcomers and immigrants, 2SLGBTQ+ people, veterans, and people living in rural, remote, and Northern communities. We also expect analysis and results to be disaggregated to the greatest extent possible, and where methodology and sample size allows, in order to provide a nuanced and descriptive understanding of data trends, patterns, and implications for different groups.

All projects must be completed in full by October 31st, 2026.



Eligibility

The following eligibility criteria apply to this Call for Proposals:

Canadian Research Organization: Applications may be submitted by a sole organization or a partnership/consortium of organizations, including:

- Post-secondary institutions;
- Not-for-profit research centres;
- For-profit research or consulting organizations are eligible, provided that they conduct this project at cost, without any markup or fees that generate profit for the organization.

For applications with multiple partners, one organization must be identified as the lead applicant for the purpose of submitting the funding proposal, signing the funding agreement, receiving and managing the funds, ensuring coordination of project parties and activities, and communicating with the Centre regarding the status of the project. The lead organization must be a Canadian entity. All participating organizations must be eligible as set out above.

Eligibility criteria include:

Experience with PIAAC: The organization and team must demonstrate relevant past projects managing PIAAC databases (or closely related international/national skills surveys) ;and include in the work plan the data acquisition strategy (e.g. detailed steps that ensure the project will access the PIAAC Cycle 2 data, as well as other relevant data sources, towards implementing the proposed research project methodology).

Team Expertise: Each research team must include at least one senior researcher (e.g., Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator) with:

- A graduate degree (Masters or doctoral) and
- Demonstrated expertise in large-scale survey data, with prior experience working with PIAAC (or closely related international/national skills surveys).

Limited Proposals: Organizations and Individuals may be named members of a research team (Lead and/or supporting) on no more than two applications for this funding call.

Organizations that have previously received or are currently receiving funding from the Future Skills Centre are eligible to apply provided that the proposal clearly outlines a scope not otherwise funded by the Future Skills Centre. Federal, provincial and territorial government ministries and agencies are not eligible to apply.



Funding Guidelines

As a general guideline, the Future Skills Centre is interested in considering proposals with budgets ranging from **\$50,000 to \$90,000** for this Call. All proposals and budgets are expected to be strongly aligned with the Selection Criteria (see next section). Partners' capacity to implement the proposed research within the prescribed timelines is of paramount importance and will be considered as part of the proposal review process.

We also welcome proposals that are jointly submitted by multiple partners (see above); partners should be able to point to positive prior collaboration and/or clear identification of roles, responsibilities and governance for the project so as not to delay implementation.

Proposals will be assessed on the criteria outlined in the guidelines detailed below. The Future Skills Centre may contact proponents during the application process to discuss adjustments to original proposals.

We expect to announce funding decisions in March 2026. Projects are expected to begin in April 2026 and must end no later than October 31st, 2026. Please note that this timeline must include allowance for [Research Ethics Board approval](#).

Additional Requirements

- **Mandatory sessions:** Successful applicants must attend a kick-off session at project start (virtual) and present results at a **PIAAC Research Seminar** (anticipated in-person in Toronto in mid-October 2026).
- **Budget for travel:** Applicants should include travel and accommodation for the **PIAAC Research Seminar** in the budget (economy airfare/rail, standard hotel, local transit, reasonable per diems). Do not purchase travel until written confirmation is provided by FSC.
- **Attendance:** Applicants should plan for two team members to attend the seminar. One team member should be someone early in their career (graduate student or junior faculty). Remote participation may be offered only in limited circumstances.
- **Accessibility and inclusion:** We will accommodate accessibility needs; please identify anticipated requirements in your application/budget notes.
- **Non-compliance:** Failure to meet participation requirements may affect funding eligibility and/or payment schedules.
- **Collection and documentation of methodological insights:** Projects will be required to share with FSC methodological insights, as well as the challenges or opportunities encountered when accessing and using PIAAC data.



Selection Criteria

The following criteria will apply to all proposals received through this call and will be assigned equal weight during review:

Relevance to PIAAC research priorities as set out by FSC: Projects should directly address one or both priority research areas – skills as drivers or skills as outcomes – and demonstrate clear alignment with the research questions set out in FSC’s [scoping paper](#). Projects should explain why the proposed research is timely and how findings will contribute to closing critical evidence and knowledge gaps.

Research Design: Proposals must present a clear design informed by prior studies, evaluations, or practice. The design should be appropriate to the research questions, methodologically sound, and feasible within the given timeframe. Strong proposals will demonstrate how the research will generate credible, timely, and actionable insights for Canada’s skills ecosystem.

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Reconciliation (EDI&R): All projects are expected to integrate EDI&R principles throughout their lifecycle, from design to implementation and dissemination. Applicants should describe how they will ensure diverse perspectives are included in the research process, particularly when engaging with or analyzing data related to equity-deserving groups such as Indigenous peoples, newcomers, racialized communities, women, persons with disabilities, and others. Where relevant, projects should include strategies to meaningfully involve these groups in shaping research analysis and/or interpreting findings. Projects are also expected to disaggregate analysis by various sub-groups.

Knowledge Mobilization and Impact: FSC places a strong emphasis on ensuring that evidence reaches decision-makers in ways that are useful and accessible. Proposals must include a plan for producing both technical outputs (such as research reports) and accessible products (e.g., summaries or issue briefs, webinars). Applicants should describe how they will position their findings to influence broader systems change, including institutional strategies, policy reforms, or program design.

Research Skills and Training: All proposals must include plans for mentoring junior researchers, such as graduate students, junior faculty and/or research assistants. Proposals should also include strategies to reflect on methodological challenges and share practical lessons from working with PIAAC data.

Value for Money: Budgets must be well-justified and proportionate to the scope and complexity of the project. Proposals that make efficient use of resources, leverage co-investments, or demonstrate cost-effectiveness will be viewed favourably.



Organizational and Team Capacity The project team must collectively demonstrate the expertise, experience, and infrastructure to carry out the project within the required timeline. Proposals should clearly identify the roles and qualifications of team members and present a realistic work plan with milestones leading to completion by **October 31st, 2026**.



Prompting Questions

These Prompting Questions are intended as an aid to help partners think about how their projects align with the Selection Criteria (above). Answers to these questions will also help applicants prepare the information they will need to fill in the proposal application form.

Relevance to PIAAC research priorities as set out by FSC:

- Which of the two areas (“skills as drivers” or “skills as outcomes”) does your project address, and how?
- Which of the specific research questions will you answer, and how will your methods address them?
- If you propose different research questions, how do they align with the PIAAC research priorities as set out by FSC in its [scoping paper](#)?

Research Design

- How do findings from prior research, evaluations, or practice inform your proposed framework and methods?
- What are the research design, methodology, and data collection methods that will guide your project in addressing its research question(s), and how will they be feasible within the project scope and timeline?
- How will your design generate credible, timely, and actionable evidence?
- To what extent will you employ innovative data analysis approaches, by linking datasets, triangulating findings, or other design-related innovations?
- How are your project’s expected contributions clearly defined, measurable, and meaningful for stakeholders, including equity-deserving groups?

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Reconciliation (EDI&R)

- How have you taken EDI&R into account in project leadership, governance, team composition, and the design of your research questions, methods, data collection, and analysis?
- What formal commitments or strategies does your organization have to advance EDI&R?
- How will you disaggregate data in your analysis and reporting?
- How will your findings be mobilized to support equity-responsive policy, practice, and systems change?



Knowledge Mobilization and Impact

- How will findings be distilled for both technical and non-technical audiences?
- What strategies will you use to ensure your deliverables are positioned to inform policy, practice, or system design?

Research Skills and Training

- How is the project supporting at least one junior researcher on strengthening their capacity to use PIAAC or other large-scale survey data?
- How will you collect and document methodological insights, as well as the challenges or opportunities encountered when accessing and using PIAAC data, to inform FSC's efforts to build tools and resources that strengthen future researchers' capacity to use the data?

Organizational and Team Capacity

- What expertise and experience do the lead researcher(s) and team bring that are directly relevant to PIAAC and the project's objectives?
- How will responsibilities be distributed among team members or partners to ensure timely and effective delivery?
- What prior success can you demonstrate in managing projects comparable in scope to your proposed PIAAC research project, with comparable budgets and funder reporting requirements?

Value for Money

- How does your budget align with the scope and complexity of the project?



Application Process and Timelines

Applications for this call for proposals will be accepted starting **November 28th, 2025**. The application deadline is **January 6th, 2026 at 5pm EST**.

Applicants should submit their proposals by completing and submitting the application form in Cognito (click [here](#) to access the form), along with the Excel budget template provided and a one-page work plan, both provided in the Cognito form.

A worksheet (available [here](#) in Word.docx format) is provided to collect your answers prior to submitting the proposal in its entirety. We created the worksheet so that you can work on your proposal offline before uploading the information into the Cognito application form.

If you would like to request accommodations or other types of support in preparing your application, please contact opencall@fsc-ccf.ca. **The Future Skills Centre will be receiving questions up to December 18, 2025.** Any information requests may also be sent to opencall@fsc-ccf.ca.

Recommendations for funding will be based on independent assessments by internal and external reviewers.

We expect to communicate funding decisions starting in March 2026 and for projects to kick off in April 2026.

Research Ethics Approval Process

The Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) sets the national standards for research involving human participants in Canada. All partners funded through FSC must comply with TCPS2 and, when necessary, obtain approval from an accredited Research Ethics Board (REB). No data collection with human participants can begin until a REB has approved the project.

Accessing and analyzing PIAAC public-use data does not necessarily require REB review. However, if the project intends to triangulate PIAAC data with any additional data collection involving human participants—including experts participating in a professional capacity through interviews, focus groups, or surveys—REB review may be required. Once a work plan or proposal is submitted, FSC's Research Ethics Lead will review it to determine the appropriate pathway to approval. Proposals involving direct engagement with participants will be assessed on a case-by-case basis to determine whether proposed data collection tools must be submitted to a REB for consideration. FSC's Research Ethics Lead will provide guidance to grantees throughout this process.

If you, or any team members, are affiliated or cross-appointed with a post-secondary institution or hospital that has its own Research Ethics Board, FSC must defer to the decision of the REB Chair



at your home institution. In these cases, it is the responsibility of the FSC-funded partner to consult their institutional REB Chair to determine whether the project requires ethics review or qualifies for an exemption. FSC will request official documentation—such as an ethics approval letter or confirmation of exemption—from the institution’s REB Chair or designated signing authority before data collection can begin.



Due Diligence

Future Skills Centre reserves the right to conduct thorough due diligence on organizations who submit a proposal.

Due diligence may include a review of the lead organization's financial health and funding sources, the project's management team, operational plans, and existing resources. The Future Skills Centre may also conduct reference checks and may reach out to provincial/territorial governments in those jurisdictions where activities would be undertaken to provide them with advance notice of the proposed projects to ensure they address local needs and complement existing initiatives.

It is the responsibility of any potential recipient of Future Skills Centre funds that proposes to conduct activities in Quebec, including with a partner organization in Quebec, to determine whether the Act respecting the Ministère du Conseil exécutif (M-30) applies to them. Any entity that is subject to the act is responsible for obtaining the necessary authorization prior to the conclusion of the agreement. The Centre will abide by the determination of the recipients whether they require an M-30 and will allow a reasonable amount of time for the proponent and partners to obtain authorization from the Government of Québec, should it be required.

The Future Skills Centre will work with successful proponents to establish project agreements. As the host organization for the Centre, all contractual agreements will be made with Toronto Metropolitan University.

Confidentiality

Hosted by Toronto Metropolitan University, the Future Skills Centre is subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) and the Access to Information Act. These acts provide every person with a right of access to information in the custody or under the control of Toronto Metropolitan University, subject to a limited set of exemptions. Section 17 of the FIPPA provides a limited exemption for third-party information that reveals a trade secret or scientific, commercial, technical, financial, or labour relations information supplied in confidence where disclosure of the information could reasonably be expected to result in certain harm. Any trade secret or any scientific, technical, commercial, financial, or labour relations information submitted to the Future Skills Centre in confidence should be clearly marked as such. The Centre will provide notice before allowing access to a record that might contain information referred to in Section 17 so that the affected party may make representations to the Centre concerning disclosure in accordance with FIPPA.