



CALL FOR DISCOVERY
WORKSHOPS

THE CIFAR ARRELL
**FUTURE OF FOOD
INITIATIVE**

PROGRAM GUIDE
2025

THE ARRELL FAMILY
FOUNDATION

**The CIFAR Arrell Future of Food Initiative is made possible
through the generous support of the Arrell Family Foundation.**

ABOUT CIFAR

The Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR) is a globally influential research organization proudly based in Canada. We mobilize the world's most brilliant people across disciplines and at all career stages to advance transformative knowledge and solve humanity's biggest problems, together. Through our 15 research programs and the Pan-Canadian AI Strategy, CIFAR convenes close to 400 of the world's top researchers from 141 institutions in 20 countries. This community has included 23 Nobel Prize laureates, 3 Turing Award winners, 37 recipients of the Gerhard Herzberg Canada Gold Medal for Science and Engineering and 2 recipients of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (Canada) Gold Medal. Our early-career programs attract and support some of the most exciting young researchers in the world today. We are supported by the governments of Canada, Alberta and Québec, as well as Canadian and international foundations, individuals, corporations and partner organizations. The CIFAR Arrell Future of Food Initiative is made possible through the generous support of the Arrell Family Foundation.

CIFAR CALL FOR DISCOVERY WORKSHOPS

CIFAR invites the global research community to submit proposals for Discovery Workshops under the broad theme of The Future of Food. CIFAR's Discovery Workshops aim to provide an opportunity for new, interdisciplinary and international research networks to collaborate. Workshop proposals must explore novel, bold, and potentially transformative questions that build on the themes posed in The Future of Food Discovery Panel Report.

Deadline for submission: October 14 at 4 pm ET

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INTRODUCTION

CIFAR invites workshop proposals from the international research community that address areas of importance within the broader topic of the Future of Food. Proposals may choose to pose new research questions or expand upon and critically engage with the three emerging insights identified in the The Future of Food Discovery Panel report:

1. How can we reimagine food production, blending the needs of the food system, people and the Earth?
2. How can we understand and shape the interdependencies between individual choices, nutrition, and human health?
3. How do food practices at individual, cultural, and community levels scale up to influence global systems, and how can global decision-making impact local food practices?

The workshop proposals should approach research questions through diverse, interdisciplinary lenses (potentially spanning the humanities, social sciences, arts, physical sciences, and life sciences) to foster sustained dialogue and spark new insights and areas of inquiry related to **The Future of Food**.

This Call for Workshops represents a first step in potentially developing new CIFAR research programs as part of a multi-year and multi-stage commitment to the Future of Food. A subset of workshop teams will advance to two-year Discovery Programs, with the most promising among them potentially evolving into full five-year CIFAR Research Programs. Discovery Programs will have the opportunity to continue exploring the questions seeded at the workshop, meeting twice per year. They will also engage with other programs (both within The Future of Food and CIFAR's broader network) to think further across disciplines and challenges as part of broadening impact. Ultimately, we aim to establish a small number of new CIFAR Research Programs that will join existing initiatives within a new Impact Cluster on the Future of Food.

CIFAR is a Canadian-based global research organization that convenes extraordinary people to address the most important questions facing science and humanity. For more than 40 years, CIFAR has focused on bringing the most talented people together to address complex challenges of importance to the world. Since its inception in 1982, CIFAR has had a

significant impact on the way the world understands critical issues such as the Earth's evolution, social identity and well-being, early child and brain development, artificial intelligence, building stronger societies, genetic networks, and many others. CIFAR takes a long-term view and supports leading-edge research with the potential for global impact. CIFAR's collaborative approach and support of research is unique, focusing on challenges that transcend disciplinary boundaries and geographic borders. CIFAR supports sustained collaborations between Canadian and international researchers to address global problems, open new fields of inquiry, and accelerate the creation and mobilization of knowledge that address these profound challenges.

CIFAR's time-tested model inspires new directions of inquiry, creating a culture of risk-taking, accelerating discovery, and yielding breakthroughs across geographic borders and academic disciplines. We are not a traditional funder of research; we are a convener of researchers. The work conducted by CIFAR contributes to a platform of robust, reliable knowledge upon which new technologies, processes and public policy are created. We provide the world's top researchers with an unparalleled environment of trust, transparency and knowledge sharing for interdisciplinary collaboration.

CIFAR is committed to equity, diversity and inclusion. We recognize that bringing together individuals from multiple backgrounds, perspectives and experiences is integral to advancing excellence and increasing the impact of our organization. Ensuring that every person feels valued and welcome is vital to achieving our mission, and embodies our values of diversity, creativity, excellence, risk taking, respect and collaboration. CIFAR strives to foster the active participation and inclusion of all, including those from underrepresented groups in research, such as but not limited to women, members of racialized groups, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, members of sexual and gender minority groups – across geographic borders, disciplines, and career stage. In the pursuit of excellence, CIFAR embraces diverse ideas and perspectives, and proactively seeks to increase equity, diversity and inclusion within our community. CIFAR aims to create a culture that embodies these principles of equity, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of our work.

CURRENT OPPORTUNITY

The Future of Food

Reimagining the global food system through the lens of individual, community, global and planetary needs.



Food is fundamental to both human and planetary health, yet it is deeply entangled in a complex web of interdependent challenges. Sitting at the heart of multiple high-level systems, including climate change, environmental degradation, agriculture, ocean economies, and food security, food systems face escalating pressure from growing demands, systemic inequities, and ecological limits. Their significance and complexity are accelerating at an unprecedented rate. How we produce, distribute, and consume food directly impacts public health, biodiversity, economic stability, cultural identity, and geopolitical dynamics. Addressing these intertwined issues in isolation risks overlooking the systemic nature of the problems and can lead to a point of no return. A deeper, more integrated understanding of food system dynamics is essential, one that brings together diverse perspectives.

The Future of Food raises profound questions about the delicate balance between humanity and the Earth's ecosystems. Globally, food insecurity is on the rise while climate change intensifies and becomes more unpredictable. Among all the Sustainable Development Goals, Goal #2: Zero Hunger has seen the greatest setbacks.¹ Meanwhile, declining biodiversity threatens traditional agricultural landscapes and accelerates transformation within urban food systems. At the same time, evolving pathogens pose new risks to crops and livestock. These urgent and interconnected challenges make the global food system one of the most critical issues shaping our collective future.

Topics selected for Discovery Workshops should have the potential to affect multiple sectors of society. Proposals that are timely in the context of world events, high-risk, or which have strong potential for advancement or refinement through an international, collaborative, and interdisciplinary approach are encouraged.

The CIFAR model offers the opportunity to focus on more speculative, but potentially high-reward research that is unconstrained by a need to prove immediate application, while being highly attentive to potential impact. By bringing together diverse groups of exceptional people, CIFAR's networks create an extraordinary opportunity for new ideas, insights and knowledge that can reshape fields and enable exciting new possibilities.

Unbounded by the constraints of a singular question, by national or disciplinary borders, CIFAR has been supporting high-risk interdisciplinary research on the world's most complex and underexplored problems since 1982. Our understanding of the importance of the early years in a child's successful trajectory throughout life, the development of deep learning artificial intelligence, the importance of social cohesion and social interactions in societal and individual well being, and some of the earliest work on quantum computing and quantum information, all emerged from CIFAR programs. The Future of Food is our next challenge.

¹United Nations. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024.
<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>

OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

Stage I: Workshop Proposal

The workshop proposal submission will outline the range of possible research questions a team will try to address and the core elements needed to conduct the workshop. Specific review criteria are detailed on the following page. Teams should submit their workshop proposals through our online portal. Proposals will be reviewed externally. CIFAR will shortlist proposals based on the recommendations of the reviewers and make final funding decisions. Approved shortlisted proposals will proceed to Stage II.

Stage II: Workshop Development

Each team that advances past Stage I will host one 2-day in-person workshop, planned in collaboration with CIFAR. **Workshops must take place by May 1, 2026.** CIFAR will provide the resources (travel, accommodation, meals) and logistical support for the workshops as needed. Workshop locations will be decided in consultation with CIFAR and may happen in Canada or globally, depending on timing and participants. The purpose of these workshops is to bring the core research team together to articulate the nature of the research question(s), how it could be tackled, and what intellectual resources (such as, additional participants or partners) are needed to make progress. Each workshop will bring together

approximately 12 researchers from across the globe. Following the workshop, the core team will be required to create a meeting report and given the opportunity to submit a program proposal in May. A subset of workshops, evaluated on factors such as novelty, interdisciplinarity, team collaboration, and potential for impact, will be invited to transition into Discovery Programs.

Stage III: Discovery Programs

Over a two-year period, Discovery Programs will build on questions generated during the workshop stage. They will operate as a small-scale CIFAR research program, providing an incubation phase for teams and ideas to thrive. By providing the enabling conditions for long-term research success, Discovery Programs offer teams the freedom to explore boldly, take risks, and tackle ambitious challenges, with the potential to evolve into a full five-year research program.

Stage IV: Full Research Program

The most promising Discovery Programs, distinguished by strong leadership, a diverse and highly talented team and compelling research content, will be selected to advance into a five-year research program, joining CIFAR's portfolio of high-impact initiatives.



CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

Proposals for Discovery Workshops will be accepted from any set of fields and will be evaluated based on the following criteria.

Transformative Research Potential

Proposals should clearly demonstrate their relevance to the call, including their connection to the themes identified either directly by The Future of Food Discovery Panel or, where appropriate, extending beyond them. They must articulate the unique or novel aspects of the proposed research, highlight its potential for societal impact, and outline how it could influence multiple sectors. We especially encourage proposals that are timely in the context of current world events, involve high-risk or high-reward ideas, and can benefit significantly from an international, collaborative, and interdisciplinary approach.

Interdisciplinary Research Team

Proposals should elaborate the need for an international and interdisciplinary approach to tackle the identified question or theme, and explain why CIFAR's involvement is essential to developing this approach. Applications require 3-5 researchers across a variety of disciplines who form the core team. CIFAR strongly encourages teams that reflect a high degree of diversity across career stages, disciplines, and personal or professional backgrounds. We explicitly encourage applications that are led by or include early career faculty. If awarded, the full workshop participant list will be developed in collaboration with CIFAR (including researchers and stakeholders). CIFAR will assist in agenda development, academic and partnership networking, and workshop facilitation. Workshop teams will be required to submit a report following the meeting, and may also submit a proposal to CIFAR to form a longer-term Discovery Program.

Excellence of Research Team

The proposal should emphasize the overall excellence of the core research team and provide a thoughtful rationale for how this group will be expanded to best address the proposed theme or question. CIFAR is committed to fostering inclusive excellence by recognizing diverse perspectives, experiences, and ways of knowing, carefully considering potential biases in the evaluation process. Our assessment of proposed program members will be holistic, taking into account their scholarly achievements, interdisciplinary openness, and commitment to collaboration. Proposed members should reflect the necessary interdisciplinarity required to address the research challenges. Applicants are encouraged to detail what additional perspectives are required, and a plan for including diverse voices in the workshop.

Alignment with CIFAR's Mission and Vision

Proponents should clearly articulate how CIFAR support will add value to the pursuit of the identified workshop's questions, including how CIFAR's model of supporting international, interdisciplinary engagement over a sustained period will contribute toward transformative knowledge creation and impact.



FURTHER INFORMATION:

Individuals interested in submitting a Discovery Workshop proposal are strongly encouraged to review [The Future of Food Discovery Panel report](#). Please contact globalcall@CIFAR.ca with any questions.



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