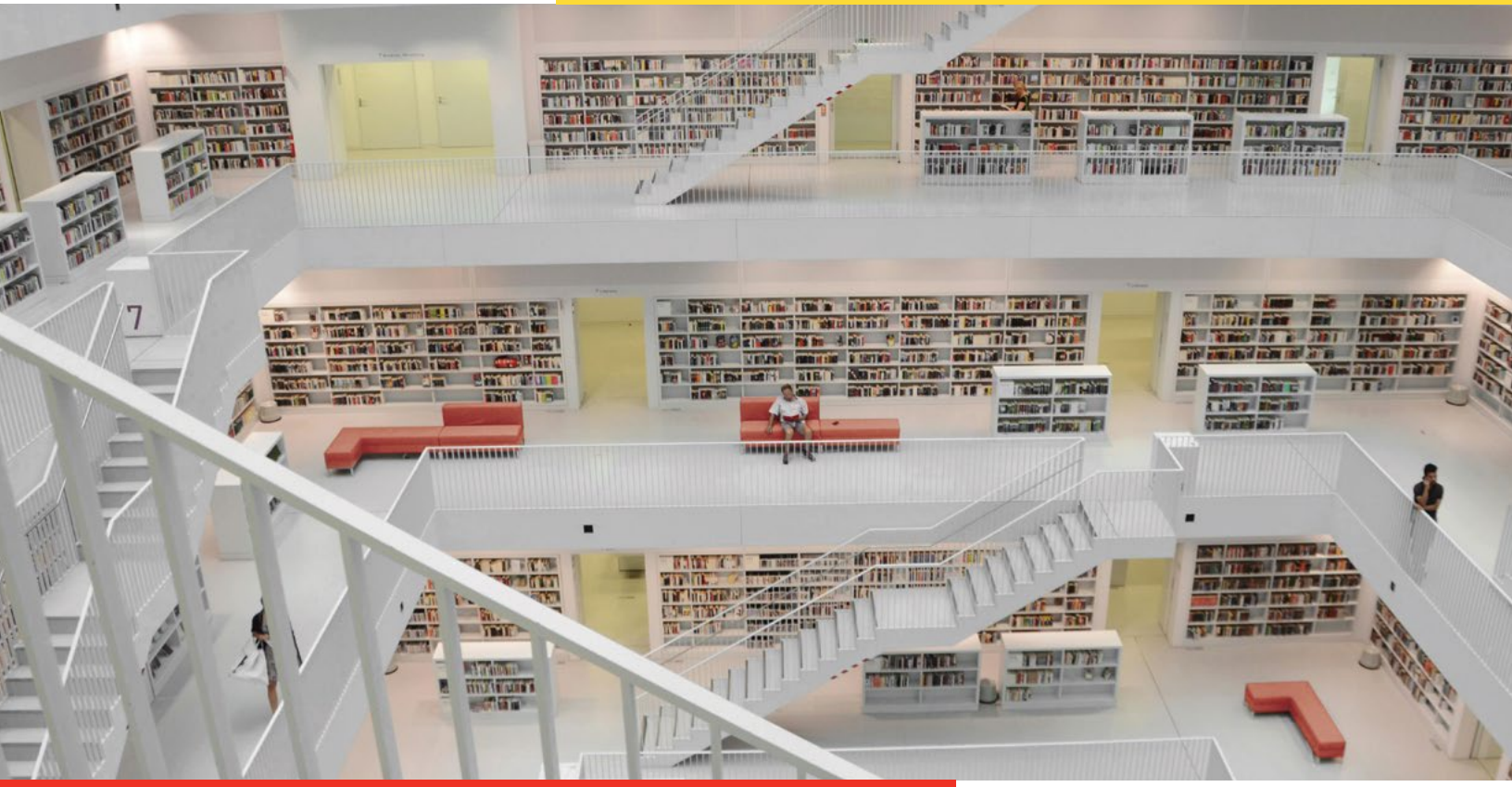
Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellowship



Detailed Program Overview
2028-2030 Cohort

Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellowship

CIFAR



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Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellowship

The Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellowship Program is a competitive fellowship for researchers who have completed their PhD within the past 10 years, whose work is dedicated to improving the learning and development of children and youth worldwide.

The scope of the fellowship is broad and inclusive of multiple determinants of success in children's education and development with a focus on pre-clinical or discovery research. These include, but are not limited to: physical and mental health, growth and development, built and natural environments and changing contexts. Scholars who seek to combine multiple types and levels of analysis and those looking to deeply engage in interdisciplinary work around the mechanistic and causal aspects of learning and child development are particularly encouraged to apply.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to position their work within the contextual framework of the Jacobs Foundation learning agenda. To find out more about the Jacobs Foundation Strategy 2030 and the research agenda, please visit the Jacobs Foundation website.

Beyond a strong fellowship proposal, ideal candidates should demonstrate clear potential for interdisciplinary collaboration across and beyond the CIFAR and Jacobs Foundation networks. Applications must therefore articulate the candidate's broader research vision and long-term priorities.

Fellows may be based at research institutions worldwide. The three-year, unrestricted grants are awarded directly to the host institution and may be used flexibly to cover a portion of the fellow's salary as well as general research expenses — including personnel, equipment, technical assistance, and travel.

About Jacobs Foundation

The Jacobs Foundation seeks to improve children's learning and education by promoting the generation and translation of evidence into policy and practice – connecting evidence to action, and action to systems. To bring us closer to our vision, we've launched Strategy 2030, with a central focus on ensuring that evidence shapes how children learn – whether in schools or through technology. We have committed CHF 500 million to bring our ambitions to life, collaborating with world-renowned researchers, educators, and visionary policymakers in Switzerland, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Colombia to make this vision a reality for every child.

Learn more about the Jacobs Foundation's work at: jacobsfoundation.org/partners

About CIFAR

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. We are supported by the governments of Canada, Alberta and Québec, as well as Canadian and international foundations, individuals, corporations and partner organizations.

Learn more about CIFAR's Next-Generation Initiative Strategy at: cifar.ca/nextgen-strategy

Program Overview

CIFAR and the Jacobs Foundation are committed to supporting emerging research leaders with an innovative vision and substantive expertise that will lead to:

- Understanding and embracing learning variability
- Translating evidence to action, especially in diverse and low-resource settings

We want to gain a better understanding of how heterogeneity and individual differences affect learning and we want to explore how these findings can be applied in practice, including by making smart use of educational technologies that offer new perspectives for both implementation and empirical investigation. We aim to inspire conversation and action among researchers, policymakers, and educators on understanding and embracing learning variability in children.

The focus of the Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellowship (JCRF) is fostering scientific excellence and building a network of internationally active researchers in the field of child and youth development with a strong focus on variability of learning and to foster long-term collaborations among researchers themselves.

Fellowships are awarded to talented researchers who have received their PhDs within the past 10 years. Funding from Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellowships is awarded directly to the Fellow's institution and may be used by the Fellow over three years to cover a portion of their salary and for any purpose in support of their research, such as research expenses, teaching release, student or postdoc support, conference travel, and more.



Timeline

The full review and selection process takes approximately six months following the application deadline. Please find the timeline below.

Date	Day	Item
November 25, 2026	Wednesday	Call Opens
January 13, 2027, 12 PM EST	Wednesday	Proposals due
January 21, 2027	Thursday	Peer Review Applications Assigned
January 27, 2027	Monday	Distributed Peer Review: Conflict of Interest declarations due
February 10, 2027, 12 PM EST	Wednesday	Distributed Peer Reviews due
February 17, 2027, 12 PM EST	Wednesday	Re-assigned peer reviews due
March 1, 2027	Monday	Extended proposals submission opens
April 2, 2027	Friday	Extended proposals due
April 12 to May 10, 2027	Monday to Monday	Extended proposals review
May 31 to June 4, 2027	Monday to Friday	Applicant interviews



Core Aspects of the Fellowship

Interdisciplinary research excellence in early education and learning variability

The fellowship is a unique chance to engage in interdisciplinary collaborations tackling research questions around early education and learning variability of global importance. Fellows will get opportunities to share work-in-progress, exchange ideas across disciplines, and develop innovative projects that inspire new insights, transform research directions, and open new fields of inquiry.

JCRF Fellows receive:

- 150,000 CHF (approximately 260,250 CAD) in unrestricted research support over three years. These flexible funds can be used for research expenses, teaching release, student or postdoc support, conference travel, and more.
- Opportunities to participate in the Annual Meetings and present their own research to other researchers. Fellows are encouraged to build relationships with other fellows and alumni, within and outside their cohorts, working in other research areas to broaden their perspectives and spark new ideas.
- Opportunities to apply for Annual Meeting seed funds. These time-limited funds support high-risk, high-reward interdisciplinary collaborations with fellows within currently active cohorts.

Developing and broadening networks

The program expands Fellows' potential for impact by broadening and deepening their networks. Through meaningful connections with peers and senior researchers, Fellows become part of a supportive research community with access to opportunities for collaboration and mentorship.

JCRF Annual Meetings bring together Fellows from across active cohorts for leadership development, networking and community-building. The retreat includes dedicated time to explore research ideas, spark interdisciplinary connections, and develop creative collaborative proposals for seed funding.

The JCRF also encourages Fellows to engage with leaders in government, industry, business and civil society. These interactions have the potential to inform the Fellows' research and amplify the reach of their work. They may occur through JCRF Annual Meetings, JCRF All Cohorts Meetings or tailored programming and workshops.

Strengthening leadership skills

Even the most accomplished early-career researchers typically step into their principal investigator roles with little formal leadership training. The JCRF tries to bridge this gap with targeted training in essential areas of research leadership, including:

- Team leadership – e.g., running effective meetings, navigating difficult conversations, negotiating
- Trainee mentorship – e.g., setting goals, giving and receiving feedback, supporting wellness and maintaining healthy boundaries
- Science communication – e.g., giving public talks, doing media interviews, using social media effectively, writing op-eds
- Science advocacy – e.g., preparing to engage with policymakers, funders, and other decision-makers

Leadership training is typically provided as an in-person workshop during the Annual Meetings or as a virtual option during the year.



Eligibility

The JCRF welcomes applicants from all countries and is committed to building a diverse, international community of scholars.

To be considered for the Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellowship, you must:

- Hold a PhD or an equivalent terminal degree obtained in or after November 2016, adjusting for periods of reduced productivity;
- Hold a full-time position at an institution of higher education or research. Positions in non-profit or for-profit institutions do not qualify. Your position must include responsibility for leading independent research as a principal investigator.
  - » In countries or institutions where the tenure-track system applies, applicants are expected to hold a full-time tenure-track position. In other contexts, equivalent positions that provide comparable independence and a pathway to a permanent faculty appointment will be considered.
  - » Your position must be secure throughout the full JCRF term, from January 1, 2028 to December 31, 2031.
  - » **Note**: Postdoctoral fellows are not eligible to apply.
- Engage in research that aligns closely with the goal of enhancing the learning and development of children and youth worldwide.
  - » Demonstrate an outstanding record of research achievement and promise of future impact, as shown through reference letters, publications, awards, and other research contributions.
  - » Show a strong interest in interdisciplinary engagement to extend and enrich the impact of your research.
- Be available for a virtual interview between **May 31 and June 4, 2027**.
- Hold a valid passport, and if applicable, be able to obtain travel visas to attend Annual Meetings globally.
- Be fluent in spoken and written English.

If you have questions about your eligibility, please contact us at: jcrf@cifar.ca

Statement on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion:

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. For more information, see CIFAR's Action Plan on Equity, Diversity & Inclusion.

Duration and Value

Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellows hold an active term of three years. The next cohort's term begins on **January 1, 2028 and concludes on December 31, 2030**.

Each Fellow receives CHF 150,000 (approximately 260,250 CAD) in unrestricted research support, administered through their home institution. These funds may be used for a range of activities, including but not limited to:

- Advancing research projects
- Buying out teaching time
- Supporting trainees
- Traveling to academic conferences

In addition to the fellowship funds, CIFAR will offer a limited travel stipend for fellows to travel to the JCRF Annual Meeting every year in June. The stipend can also be used flexibly to arrange for child and dependent care as needed.

Offers and Expectations

Along with independent and unrestricted funding, the fellowship also offers a range of non-financial benefits. Fellows are expected to make use of these opportunities for networking and development and to engage with the Jacobs Foundation as detailed below.

Offers	Expectations
Networking and alumni events and opportunity for exchange with other Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellows and alumni	Participation in and contribution to events organized by the Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellowship, e.g Annual Meetings Interaction and collaboration with other Fellows
Media channels to disseminate your work to the broader scientific and public audience	Contribution to communication activities of the Fellowship, e.g., BOLD articles, CIFAR interviews Help highlight communication, e.g., through own social media channels
Opportunities for leadership development through integration into the Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellowship network (e.g., exchange on online platform, attendance of conferences and meetings)	Provide details on leadership development, e.g., on publications, grants, new positions, media coverage, exchange with policy and decision makers once a year in an annual progress report
A meaningful partnership including ample space for innovative ideas and activities within and beyond the research sector	Active partnership with CIFAR and the Jacobs Foundation by providing ideas and activities, e.g., organizing symposia at international conferences or workshops with other Research Fellows and alumni Interest in CIFAR and the Jacobs Foundation's programs and, where feasible, active involvement.
Recognition as part of the Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellowship network	Acknowledgment of support from the Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellowship (e.g., in publications, presentations)

Deadlines and How to Apply

The call for applications opens on **November 25, 2027 and closes on January 13, 2027 at 12 PM EST**.

JCRF Fellowship applications are accepted annually. All applications must be submitted online using the form linked at: cifarportal.smapply.io/prog/2026_jacobs_cifar_research_fellowship_program

Application Components

All components of the application must be submitted in English.

Eligibility section

1. What is the nature of the organization where you are currently employed?
2. Enter the year of receiving your highest degree
3. If you have had any career breaks since completing your highest degree (e.g. parental leave, illness, or other positions), please enter this duration in years and months
4. What is the age range of the population you plan to study? Please use the following format, in years: earliest age to latest age e.g., 3-12

Initial Application

The first round of application focuses strongly on the alignment of your research plans with the goals of the fellowship. For the Initial Round, you are required to submit the following materials through the online application form:

1. Personal Information
2. Current fields of expertise
3. Subfields of expertise
4. Details of current employment
5. Career Information
6. Initial Application
    a. Brief summary of your current research (max 220 words)
    b. Brief summary of your planned research (max 220 words)
    c. Explain how winning the Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellowship will produce unique and important progress towards advancing the current state of knowledge related to your planned research (max 100 words)
    d. Attach the one paper you have published that is most relevant to the Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellowship (File types - pdf, 25 MB size limit)
    e. Explain the relevance of the attached paper to the Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellowship (max 100 words)
    f. Attach a list of your research publications (File types - pdf, 25 MB size limit)

There is no CV or reference letter required at this stage of the application.

Extended Application

The second round focuses on details of your planned research for the fellowship period. If selected to advance to the Extended Round, you will be required to submit the following materials through the online application form:

1. **Research Overview & Significance**: Describe your core research questions, their global relevance, and their potential to advance learning. Please use non-technical language. (max 600 words)
2. **Methodology & Design**: Detail your prioritized research questions (and hypotheses, if applicable), methodology, data sets, and sample populations. (max 900 words)
3. **Program Alignment**: How does your work align with the strategic goals of the Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellowship? (max 300 words)
4. **Fund Utilization & Career Advancement**: How will the Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellowship funding accelerate your research projects and professional growth? (max 300 words)
5. **Impact & Risk Management**: Explain your work's expected impact on development and learning. Identify potential risks and your mitigation strategies. (max 300 words)
6. **Measuring Success**: How will you measure project success and impact at the end of the fellowship and two years post-grant? (e.g., career milestones, follow-up funding, practical applications) (max 150 words)

7. Narrative CV
8. Budget
9. Timeline and Milestones
10. Reference letter

All applications must be submitted through the online application system. Those received by any other method, as well as applications not submitted by the deadline, will not be reviewed.

Interview

The interview section will assess the applicant across multiple axes such as curiosity and engagement, interpersonal skills, adaptability and flexibility, and potential for impact.

- **Flash Talk** - You will be requested to submit a video of yourself giving a five-minute flash talk about your research expertise and how it positions you to do the work that you have proposed in your application – without using slides, illustrations, special effects, or editing. Your talk should be geared to an educated, but non-specialist audience, with the use of anecdotes and metaphors to make concepts accessible. You will also have the opportunity to watch all the flash talk videos of the other applicants to get a better understanding of their work.

- **Virtual Interview** - You will receive a calendar invite for a 25-minute virtual online interview to be held during the week of May 31 to June 4, 2027. Interviews will typically be held between 9 AM and 12 PM Eastern Time / 3 PM and 6 PM Central European Time.



Application Review Process and Criteria

Initial Review

All applications in the initial application stage will undergo Distributed Reciprocal Peer Review for assessment. By submitting an application, all applicants accept the following terms and conditions:

- Each applicant will be expected to participate in the peer review process. **If you cannot participate in the peer review process, your own application will not proceed.**
- All applicants will receive between **5 to 7** applications to review.
- For each review you will be expected to carefully read the listed sections of each application assigned to you, and provide decisions as well as a short justification for the same.
- If reviews from a single applicant are found to be of consistently poor quality (for example, they do not justify the overall decisions), their own application may not proceed.
- To ensure a fair review process, multiple safeguards will be instituted to ensure that there is no major Conflict of Interest during the assignment of applications. Applicants can also manually flag conflicts of interest to allow for a re-assignment of applications to review.

CIFAR will also use internal moderators to safeguard the assessment of this funding opportunity. Where applications receive markedly divergent reviewer scores, the internal moderators will advise on any reviews that should be excluded from the assessment process.

Please find the JCRF Peer Review guide here.

Extended Review

Extended Reviews will be conducted by a team consisting of fellowship alumni from across a range of disciplines.

Reviewers will assess applications according to a set of broader evaluation criteria applied across the entire application. The main evaluation criteria are:

- Scientific quality of methods and data
- Creativity
- Potential for real-world applications
- International relevance of the applicant's planned work
- Willingness to engage with the goals of the Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellowship

Please also note that broader considerations related to your scientific excellence, past accomplishments, and overall track record will also be taken into account during the review process. In general, please remember that reviewers seek high-quality, interdisciplinary work that focuses on individual development and variability in the learning of children and youth.

Interview

The final interview round is conducted by a Selection Committee consisting of administrators from CIFAR and the Jacobs Foundation, along with select external experts that include academic researchers and professionals across the funding landscape.

Reviewers will assess applicants according to a set of broader evaluation criteria applied across the entire application. The main evaluation criteria are:

- Curiosity and engagement
- Interpersonal skills
- Adaptability and flexibility
- Potential for impact

Administrative Guidelines and Policies

Term

JCRF Fellows hold an active term of three years. The next cohort's term begins on January 1, 2028 and concludes on December 31, 2030. Fellows must hold a full-time position at an institution of higher education or research, with responsibility for leading independent research as a principal investigator for the full length of their term.

Eligible Use of Funds

CIFAR expects that JCRF Fellows will use the 150,000 CHF (approximately 260,250 CAD) in unrestricted research support to enhance their capacity to conduct research. Eligible uses include, but are not limited to: research projects, teaching release, trainee support and conference travel. We also expect that the fellow allocates up to 3000 CHF every year, or 9000 CHF in total (up to approximately 15,000 CAD in total) for leadership development and mentorship opportunities. This must be indicated in the applicant's proposal and as a line in the uploaded budget. CIFAR can provide Fellows with a list of consultants as per their requests.

Disbursement of Funds

Funds will be administered through the recipient's institutional department. CIFAR will issue a financial letter to initiate the transfer. We request that the funds be held in a dedicated account managed by the Fellow. As a non-profit charitable organization, CIFAR requests that no overhead or administrative fees be charged on these funds. However, if necessary, a maximum of additional 10% overhead can be requested to cover any overhead. Additionally, funds may not be used to cover fringe benefits.

Parental Leave Policy

- CIFAR expects that the home institution's parental leave policy will apply, with salary funding for any leave coming from the home institution. Where applicable, the Fellow's term will be extended by the length of the parental leave, following a No Cost Extension request to the Program Manager.
- Notice of parental leave should be given to the Program Manager before the leave is anticipated to begin.

Understanding Longer-term Impact

CIFAR and the Jacobs Foundation will continue to engage with Fellows to measure the longer-term impacts of the JCRF program. CIFAR will conduct exit surveys and follow-up surveys at intervals to track career progression, interaction patterns, and other outcomes.



Frequently Asked Questions

When is the deadline for submitting an application?

The application must be submitted by January 13, 2027, 12 PM EST.

Is funding for overhead fixed at 10%?

Yes. The amount of overhead funding is not negotiable. The 10% amount is provided in addition to the grant of 150,000 CHF (for a total of 165,000 CHF).

What if I have been on leave, e.g., parental leave(s), sick leave or other since receiving my PhD?

We allow for adjustments for periods of reduced productivity. Please indicate this in your application form.

I have not yet received my PhD. May I still apply?

The terminal degree must be completed by the time the fellowship is awarded (the end of August 2027). Please note that if you apply, you will be competing with other candidates who are several years post-PhD.

Can I apply together with other researchers?

No, the fellowship is awarded to an individual researcher. Joint applications are not allowed.

Do I need to be employed?

Yes. At the start of the fellowship, candidates must be employed at a university or other research institution. If received, the fellowship funds must be administered by the relevant university or research institution.

May I move to another institution during the fellowship period?

Yes. Fellowship funds awarded to you can be transferred to another institution during the active fellowship period.

Is there a geographic focus when selecting fellows?

The fellowship program is international and open to researchers from any country. The question on the application regarding a geographic focus refers to the focus of your research.

When does the fellowship start?
The three-year Jacobs CIFAR Research Fellowship begins on January 1, 2028 and ends on December 31, 2030. These dates are not negotiable.

Am I required to submit a budget?

For the initial application, a budget is not required. However, if invited to submit an extended proposal, you are asked to add an overview budget as well as a timeline of planned activities.

If I am not selected on my first try, may I reapply?

Yes, you are encouraged to re-apply if you are within the timeline for eligibility.



Notes



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