

Participatory Action Research Grants Application Guide

Participatory Action Research (PAR) grants support research that is co-designed and co-led by community members and researchers to better understand the root causes of a clearly defined health issue affecting their community. The research must be a partnership between a community organization and an institution with access to a research ethics board, such as a university, health authority, or other research-based organization.



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PURPOSE

This funding supports **health-related research projects** that use a participatory action research (PAR) methodology.

PAR projects are **co-designed and co-led by community members and researchers** to understand the root causes of pressing issues that negatively affect people's **physical** or **mental health**, or clearly defined **community-level health outcomes**.

For this program, **PAR projects must focus on a specific health issue or outcome and clearly describe how it affects people's health**, explaining the direct link between the issue and its impact on health and well-being. Projects may include social determinants of health only if their direct impact on a health outcome is central to the research. The link to health must be clear, well explained, and supported by a **logical causal pathway**.

Projects that examine social determinants without clearly connecting them to a specific health outcome are not eligible.

DEFINING PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a collaborative approach in which community members and researchers work as equal partners to understand and address a defined health issue. PAR is grounded in the principle that research must be done with people, not on them or for them.

While PAR can take different forms, strong PAR projects share several core features:

- **Community members and researchers are active co-participants** in all phases of the research
- **The team learns from one another**, combining lived experience and research expertise
- **The research process includes ongoing reflection and shared decision-making**
- **The work is action-oriented**, aiming to influence systems and contribute to meaningful change

In PAR, "action" is integral to the research itself. Teams gather evidence, reflect on what they are learning, and adjust their approach as they go. Findings are used not only to describe the health issue, but to help transform it. PAR draws on the strengths of both community members and researchers: community members contribute lived experience and contextual insight, while researchers bring methodological and ethical expertise. Together, they co-design and co-lead research that supports meaningful action.

PAR grant streams

We offer two different grant streams to reflect the various stages of a participatory action research process: **Convene and Investigate**. Below are more details on each specific grant type to help your research team determine best where your project aligns.

CONVENE GRANTS

Convene grants are short-term grants (up to \$25,000 for up to one year) that help teams come together to unpack a clearly defined health issue or health outcome. These grants support early work to understand what is driving the issue, including the system behaviors that have created it or are keeping it in place. The goal of a Convene grant is for the research team to develop research questions and a viable research project plan.

Convene grants help teams develop a strong foundation for future research by:

- clarifying the health issue and why it matters
- identifying the factors that may be influencing it
- shaping a clear and focused research question
- building the relationships and structures needed for a participatory action research project

Projects must be **anchored in a specific health issue**, not general exploration or program design. The primary outcome of a Convene grant is a viable research project plan.

Convene grants support activities such as:

- **Bringing together potential team members** — including community members, researchers, and other partners — to identify research questions or emerging issues that could form the basis of a future Investigate grant.
- **Early planning and discussion** among potential partners to assess the viability of the research idea, the partnership, and the team's readiness to co-lead a participatory action research project.
- **Community engagement activities** that help clarify or refine a research question or the direction of a research project.
- **Building relationships with people and groups** who influence practice, care, or policy in ways that could support a future research project.

INVESTIGATE GRANTS

Investigate grants are multi-year grants (up to \$100,000 per year over three years, for a total of up to \$300,000) that help teams answer a research question, analyze their findings, and share knowledge in a way that supports the community and others to take action on a health issue.

Investigate grants support activities such as:

- **Supporting research teams with a clear and viable participatory research plan** that is grounded in the investigation of a specific, defined health issue or health outcome affecting a population.
- **Strengthening collaboration and knowledge exchange** between community members, organizations, and institutions that are affected by, or have a role in addressing the health issue.
- **Ensuring the research is community-led** and designed to generate evidence that can inform meaningful, evidence-based action in the future.

A fully formed research question is required for the Investigate grant stream and should encompass the following:

- **Clearly identify the specific health issue or outcome being examined.** Applications should name the health issue directly, not describe it broadly or indirectly.
- **Explain why this issue matters and who is most affected.** Your question should demonstrate urgency, relevance, and the populations or communities experiencing the greatest impact.
- **Identify a gap in existing knowledge.** The research question should address an area that is not already well understood and where new research is needed to support action.
- **Focus on understanding what is happening and why,** rather than on how a program or intervention will be delivered.

AVAILABLE GRANTS

PAR will award around \$2 million for the 2026 cycle.

- Convene grants — around 8 grants of up to \$25,000 for up to one year
- Investigate grants — around 6 grants of up to \$100,000 per year for up to three years

NEW: This year we have some additional funding for the research of childhood diseases and are well positioned to support one or two projects in this area specifically.

PAR grants at a glance

	CONVENE	INVESTIGATE
Purpose of grant	To develop a participatory action research project plan	To investigate a research question about the root cause(s) of a pressing issue impacting the health of communities
Available amount to grant	Up to \$25,000	Up to \$100,000 per year
Length of grant	Up to 1 year	Up to 3 years
Requires matching funds	No	No
Application process	One stage	Two stages

Grant fit example

Below is an example of a well-aligned research question for PAR. Depending on the activities the applicant is asking for, it can be a good fit for Convene or Investigate.

STRONG FIT

A participatory study examining how overcrowded housing conditions contribute to higher rates of respiratory illness among low-income families, and why these conditions persist despite existing policies.

Why it works:

- There's a specific health outcome identified: respiratory illness.
- It maps out a direct causal pathway: overcrowding --> poor ventilation/exposure --> illness
- There's a clear "what" and "why" focus: it investigates the health issue (respiratory illness) and its underlying causes.
- The health outcome is clearly described: housing conditions are examined because they directly affect a population's health.

WEAK FIT

A project exploring general housing challenges faced by community members and identifying opportunities to improve housing access.

Why it's weaker:

- There's no defined health issue or health outcome.
- The exploration of housing is broad, rather than having a clear research question tied to health.
- It leans toward planning and program development rather than investigating what is happening and why.
- The health connection is implied but not clearly described or demonstrated.

Eligibility

To apply for a PAR grant, your project must be **co-led by community members and researchers** and meet all of the following requirements:

- **The applicant organization must be a qualified donee defined by the Canada Revenue Agency.**
- **The application must be submitted as a partnership** between:
 - a **community organization**, and
 - an **institution with access to a research ethics board**, such as a university, health authority, or other research-based organization.
- **Either partner may serve as the applicant organization**, as long as it is a qualified donee. The other partner would be listed as the **partner organization** on the application.
- **Grant payments will be issued to the applicant organization**, which becomes the financial recipient and primary administrative contact.
- **Partnerships must be clearly established prior to applying.**
- Each application must have two leads on the research project, one from each organization. They are referred to as co-principal investigators. **An individual may serve as a co-principal investigator on only one application to help ensure equitable access to limited funding.**

ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

- Research team salaries and benefits for research assistants, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and other hired team members. This excludes salaried researchers or faculty members with protected research time. Graduate students can be co-lead researchers, but they cannot be paid through the PAR grant if they're in that role. PAR funding can be used to buy out time for other faculty (up to 20% or one day per week) and community co-lead researchers
- Supplies and materials: Expendable supplies (e.g. survey forms, postage, recording equipment, office supplies).
- Research-related travel: Travel required for data collection, community meetings, or knowledge exchange.
- Knowledge exchange: Activities that share findings of the research with community members, policy makers, and the broader research community.
- Support for participants: Honorariums for community members participating in research.

- Costs to access data: Fees for datasets.
- Technology and infrastructure investments
- Communications and outreach
- Relationship and network building

INELIGIBLE EXPENSES

- Salaries for institutional researchers: Salaried researchers with protected research time.
- Service or program delivery requests
- Program evaluation
- Consultation-only activities (e.g. projects where community members are consulted but do not share decision-making power throughout the research process)
- General community development without a health focus
- Research that does not include community leadership
- Broad exploratory work without a defined health issue
- Research focused on the design, improvement, or delivery of a specific program or service (e.g. "What is the most effective way to deliver X?")
- General operating expenses (rent, utilities, admin salaries) unless it's directly tied to the research.
- Retroactive or pre-application costs: Any expenses incurred before the application date.
- Capital or infrastructure projects: Buildings, renovations, equipment for general operations.
- Events (unless directly connected to a PAR proposal)
- Event sponsorships (unless directly connected to a PAR proposal)
- Bridge funding: funds to cover immediate cash flow needs while waiting for more permanent funding
- Endowment funds: funds gifted to an endowment to have its returns used for the future.
- Operating deficits or after-the-fact support
- Debt retirement
- Monetary reserves
- Mortgage pay-downs
- Large capital and public infrastructure projects (e.g. libraries, schools, health care facilities)
- Travel to and/or attendance at conferences, competitions, or symposia
- Bursaries, scholarships, and awards
- General organizational operating expenses (e.g. (rent, utilities, general administrative salaries, and other ongoing operational costs) unless the cost is clearly and directly related to the research project
- University overhead costs: *Vancouver Foundation is a charitable foundation, and as such, we request that our grants be exempt from universities' standard practice of deducting a percentage of grant dollars for overhead and indirect research costs.*
- Activities deemed not charitable as defined by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA)

Key dates

SEPTEMBER 14, 2026

At 9 am PT, applications open for Convene and stage 1 Investigate grants via the online grant management system (GMS).

SEPTEMBER 10 (11 AM TO 12 PM) AND SEPTEMBER 23 (2 TO 3 PM), 2026

Online information sessions are hosted by PAR grant managers via Zoom.

OCTOBER 13, 2026

At 5 pm PT, online applications close for Convene and stage 1 Investigate grants.

OCTOBER TO MID-DECEMBER 2026

Vancouver Foundation staff and Community Advisors review all Convene and stage 1 Investigate grant applications.

MID-DECEMBER 2026

Decisions are sent via email for Convene grants final decisions and invitations for stage 2 Investigate grants.

DECEMBER 15, 2026

At 9 am PT, applications open for stage 2 Investigate grants.

JANUARY 18, 2027

At 5 pm PT, applications close for stage 2 Investigate grants.

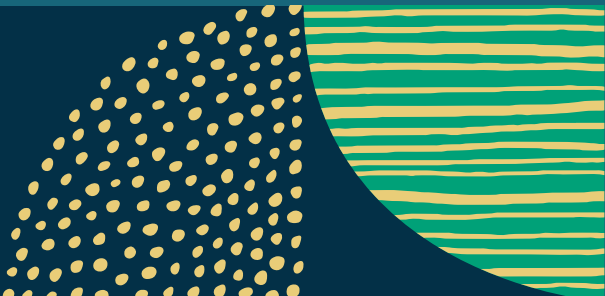
JANUARY TO LATE FEBRUARY 2027

Vancouver Foundation staff and Community Advisors review all stage 2 Investigate grant applications.

LATE FEBRUARY 2027

Final funding decisions are sent via email to stage 2 Investigate grant applicants.

How to apply



STEP 1:

Download and read the PAR application guide, PAR FAQs, and complete the [eligibility quiz](#) to determine your research project's eligibility.

STEP 2:

Decide which PAR grant stream suits your research project.

STEP 3:

Attend an info session or connect with the PAR grant managers.

STEP 4:

Sign in to or create a new user profile via [our online grant management system \(GMS\)](#) to access Convene and stage 1 Investigate applications.

- For new users: If you've never applied for a grant using this system, please create a profile by selecting "Register Here" at the top left of your screen. You can also watch our [video on how to create an account on GMS](#) to walk you through this process.
- Returning users: If you've applied for a Vancouver Foundation grant before, you can log in with your username and password.
- If you can't remember your login credentials, please select "Forgot Password" and follow the instructions when prompted. Please check your spam/junk email folder in case the email containing the reset information was sent there.

STEP 5:

In the portal, go to the **"Apply"** section (top right) and select **2026 Participatory Action Research Grants** for the stream you wish to apply for (**Convene** or **Investigate**).

STEP 6:

Submit your **Convene** or **Investigate stage 1** application by **5 pm PT on October 13, 2026**. You will receive a confirmation email from no-reply@vancouverfoundation.ca once submitted.

STEP 7:

Final Convene decisions and Investigate stage 1 decisions (invite to stage 2 / declines) will be emailed to applicants in **mid-December 2026**.

INVESTIGATE GRANTS (STAGE 2)

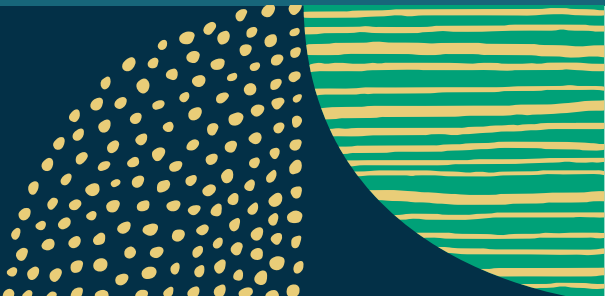
If you are invited to submit a stage 2 Investigate application:

STEP 8:

Log into the online grant management system to complete and submit the full application between **December 15, 2026 and January 18, 2027**.

Investigate stage 2 award/decline decisions will be emailed to applicants by late **February 2027**.

Reporting requirements



For both Convene and Investigate grants, progress reports are due once a year. They help us ensure funds are used as intended, understand how work is unfolding, learn from grantee experience, and share examples of impact. They also help us improve the grant program. We understand that organizations are already stretched thin, and reporting can be a burden on resources. That's why we aim to keep the reporting requirements reasonable, with a focus on learning. More information will be provided to successful grant recipients on the Grant Information Sheet after final decisions are communicated.

Contact us

If you have any questions about PAR grants, including how to navigate and troubleshoot the online grant management system, please email us at [**grants.admin@vancouverfoundation.ca**](mailto:grants.admin@vancouverfoundation.ca).