

Participatory Action Research Grants Frequently Asked Questions



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Eligibility

1. WHO ARE THESE GRANTS FOR?

Participatory Action Research (PAR) Grants support research co-designed and co-led by community service organizations and researchers to explore the root causes of pressing issues that negatively impact people's **physical** or **mental health**, or clearly defined **community-level health outcomes** — measurable changes in health status that occur across a group of people (rather than just individuals).

The research projects we consider for funding:

- Must investigate the root causes of a complex health issue
- **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 name two research project leads who will serve as co-principal investigators, one from each organization.

2. WHAT IS THE FOCUS OF THE 2026 PAR FUNDING?

This year, **PAR projects must focus on a specific health issue or outcome and clearly explain how it affects people's health.** Projects may address social determinants of health only when their direct impact on a health outcome is central to the research. In other words, the connection to health must be explicit, well explained, and supported by a clear causal pathway.

Projects that examine social determinants without linking them to a specific community-

level health outcome are not eligible.

3. HAVE THERE BEEN ANY CHANGES TO THE 2026 PAR GRANT PROGRAM AND/OR FUNDING PURPOSE? IF SO, WHAT ARE THEY?

The funding purpose of PAR remains unchanged. This year, we have clarified our language and **refined our definition of “health”**, as it applies to this program, to improve transparency around eligibility. In addition, we have **revised application questions** to provide greater clarity and stronger alignment with the assessment criteria — without requiring applicants to provide new or additional information compared to previous years.

This clarification was made because, over time, we have seen an increased number of ineligible applications or applications not aligned with the program’s purpose. This is particularly true for proposals focused on social determinants of health that do not demonstrate a clear connection to physical or mental health outcomes, or that lack clearly defined community-level health impacts.

4. WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY COMMUNITY-LEVEL HEALTH OUTCOMES?

In this grant’s context, **“community-level health outcomes”** means **measurable changes in health status that occur across a group of people in a community**, rather than just for individual participants. These outcomes are typically observable at a population level (e.g., a neighbourhood, city, cultural group, or service population) and are directly tied to **physical or mental health**.

For example, research looking at substance use harms, mortality and life expectancy, or access-related outcomes. Things like housing, income, food access, or education are *social determinants of health*. They’re important, but not community-level health outcomes on their own.

5. WHAT IS A QUALIFIED DONEE?

Under the Income Tax Act, a qualified donee is an organization that can issue official donation receipts for gifts it receives from individuals and corporations, such as a registered charity. Registered charities can also make gifts to qualified donees.

6. WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY ‘PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR) METHODOLOGY’?

At the core of the PAR methodology is the belief that research should be conducted with

people, rather than for or on them.¹ The 'action' part of PAR refers to how evidence is gathered and how issues are researched. The action becomes part of the subject matter being researched.

Throughout the project, the team takes action to develop the research and inform its future direction. Action also means that research moves beyond just observing or studying an issue and focuses on using the research findings to transform it.

¹ Chevalier, JM and Buckles, DJ. Participatory Action Research: Theory and Methods for Engaged Inquiry. UK: Routledge; 2013.

7. WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY 'COMMUNITY SERVICE ORGANIZATION'?

A community service organization is typically a charity or non-profit with a strong connection to the community experiencing the health issue that is being researched. This organization likely represents and is comprised of individuals with lived experience of the issue being studied.

8. CAN ONE INDIVIDUAL BE A CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR ON MULTIPLE APPLICATIONS?

No, an individual may only serve as a research project lead and co-principal investigator on one application to ensure equitable access to limited funding. It's possible that a co-principal investigator may be on multiple research teams, but they can only serve that role on one submitted application.

9. MY ORGANIZATION IS NATIONAL, BUT WE CONDUCT SOME WORK IN BRITISH COLUMBIA (B.C.). ARE WE ELIGIBLE?

Yes, we will fund organizations based elsewhere in Canada whose projects and work take place primarily in B.C. Vancouver Foundation will only fund expenses related to B.C.-based activities and/or impact.

10. I'VE PREVIOUSLY RECEIVED A VANCOUVER FOUNDATION GRANT. CAN I STILL APPLY FOR THIS GRANT?

Yes, you can still apply for a PAR grant if you've received another grant from Vancouver Foundation. But we only award one PAR grant at a time to each project team.

11. CAN I SUBMIT MULTIPLE APPLICATIONS FOR MY ORGANIZATION?

Yes, different project teams working on different research may apply from the same institution.

However, we only consider one application per project team. Submitting more than one application from the same institution will not increase the likelihood that your project team will receive funding.

12. MY ORGANIZATION IS NOT A QUALIFIED DONEE. CAN VANCOUVER FOUNDATION HELP ME FIND A REGISTERED CHARITY OR OTHER QUALIFIED DONEE TO PARTNER WITH FOR MY APPLICATION?

No. Vancouver Foundation is unable to broker these types of relationships as they need to be formalized by both organizations ahead of the grant application submission.

13. CAN I APPLY FOR FUNDING FOR A PROJECT THAT HAS ALREADY STARTED?

Yes. We will consider applications for research projects that have already begun, provided that the request does not include expenses that have been, will be, or that we feel should be covered by other funding sources.

Vancouver Foundation does not provide retroactive funding, nor bridge funding to sustain research projects between grants. Applying for a project that is already underway will not increase the likelihood of it being funded.

14. DO I NEED TO USE THE FUNDS WITHIN A CERTAIN TIME FRAME?

We trust that you intend to use the funding within six months of being awarded a grant and will use each year's payment within 12 months of receiving it. However, we know things can change, and we just ask that you stay connected with us if that happens.

15. WHAT CAN THE FUNDS BE USED FOR?

PAR grants support research projects that empower communities to create lasting change. Expenses can include, but are not limited to:

- 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.
- Administration related to research project
- 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 educate or share the research taking place
- 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

16. WHAT ACTIVITIES/EXPENSES ARE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR PAR FUNDING?

PAR grants do not fund the following:

- 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 part of a broader project proposal)
- Event sponsorships (unless part of a broader project 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 (unless part of a broader project proposal)
- Activities deemed not charitable as defined by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA)

17. HOW WILL FUNDING BE DISTRIBUTED?

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 for a total of \$300,000

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.

18. ARE UNIVERSITY OVERHEAD COSTS ELIGIBLE?

No. University overhead and indirect research costs are not eligible expenses under Vancouver Foundation research grants.

Vancouver Foundation is a charitable foundation and requests that its grants be exempt from universities' standard practice of deducting a percentage of grant funding for institutional overhead, facilities charges, or indirect research costs.

Grant funds are intended to directly support research activities and research-related project expenses rather than institutional overhead.

19. ARE GENERAL ORGANIZATIONAL OPERATING EXPENSES ELIGIBLE?

No. General operating expenses for either partner are not eligible unless they are directly related to and necessary for carrying out the research project.

Examples of ineligible operating expenses include:

- General office rent or facilities costs
- Utilities (e.g., electricity, internet, heating)
- Routine office supplies for general organizational use
- Core administrative or executive salaries unrelated to the research project
- General bookkeeping, finance, human resources, or administrative functions that support the organization as a whole
- Other ongoing operational expenses not specifically incurred for the funded research

Grant program details

20. WHAT TYPES OF GRANTS ARE AVAILABLE FOR RESEARCH PROJECTS?

Depending on the stage of your research, we have two grants available for your project:

Convene grants are short-term grants 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 system behaviours that have created it or are keeping it in place. The goal of a Convene grant is for the research team to develop a viable research project plan.

Investigate grants are multi-year grants to help teams answer a research question, analyze their findings, and share knowledge in a way that supports the community to take future action.

A fully formed research question is required at the Investigate grant stage and should include 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.

21. WHAT IS THE MAXIMUM/MINIMUM AMOUNT I CAN REQUEST?

It depends on the stage of your research, grant type, and the scope of your initiative.

For Convene grants, you can request up to \$25,000, for up to one year.

For Investigate grants, applicants may request up to \$100,000 per year for up to three years, for a maximum total grant of \$300,000.

22. DO YOU REQUIRE MATCHING FUNDS FROM OTHER SOURCES?

No. For both Convene grants and Investigate grants, we **do not** require organizations to match funds from other sources.

23. WHAT ARE IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS?

In-kind contributions are non-cash resources provided to support a project. They must be directly related to the project and represent real, anticipated, or essential costs that would otherwise need to be covered by the project budget. Examples include donated goods and services, which if not donated, would have to be purchased with project funds. It can also include paid staff time from partner organizations when they provide expertise, guidance, or support for the research project (not including volunteer time). In some cases, partners may provide specialized skills and advice, as well as access to specialized equipment, space, and data sets — these all count as in-kind contributions.

Application process

24. WHAT IS THE APPLICATION PROCESS?

All applications must be submitted through Vancouver Foundation's **online grant management system**. Both grant streams Convene and Investigate (for stage 1) will open at 9am on September 14, 2026, and close at 5pm on October 13, 2026. You can prepare your application using the application questions below:

- **Convene grant application questions**
- **Investigate grant application questions**

25. WHEN CAN WE EXPECT DECISIONS?

Typically, the Convene grant application process takes approximately three months, following the close of applications on October 13, 2026. **We intend to communicate final decisions for Convene grants by December 2026.**

The Investigate grant application process takes approximately six months following the close of applications on October 13, 2026. **We intend to communicate final decisions for Investigate grants by February 2027.**

All important dates are listed on our **PAR webpage** under the Key dates section.

26. WHO IS MAKING THE FUNDING DECISIONS?

Funding decisions are made through a shared process between Community Advisors and Vancouver Foundation staff, with final funding recommendations approved by the Vice President of Grants and Community Initiatives and the CEO. Below is a general summary of the process:

1. Staff conduct an initial review to confirm eligibility and alignment with PAR criteria.
2. Community Advisors review eligible applications and provide recommendations grounded in community knowledge and health research expertise.
3. Vancouver Foundation staff consider these recommendations alongside program requirements, equity considerations, and restricted funding availability before preparing final recommendations.

4. The Vice President of Grants and Community Initiatives and the CEO review and approve the final funding recommendations.

27. CAN I APPEAL A GRANT DECISION?

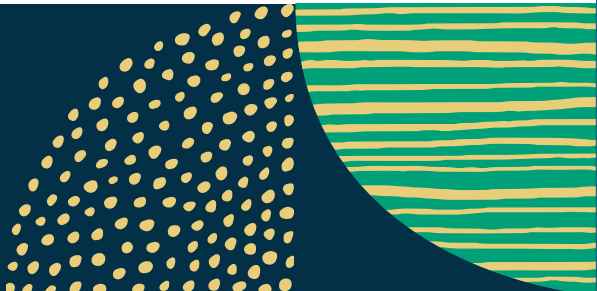
No. You cannot appeal a granting decision. If your application is not successful, we will let you know why it did not meet our criteria. We recognize that sometimes you may disagree with the granting decision or process. In these cases, we encourage you to speak with the staff member listed on the final decision email.

28. WHAT ARE THE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS?

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.

Support



29. I NEED TECH SUPPORT WITH MY APPLICATION. WHO DO I CONTACT?

You can watch our playlist of [grant application support videos on YouTube](#). Alternatively, you can email us at grants.admin@vancouverfoundation.ca.