Global Cardiovascular Research Funders Forum (GCRFF)
International Research Challenge (IRC) on
Women's Cardiovascular Health

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

September 25, 2024

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A. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Competition Overview	Key dates [Greenwich Mean Time, GMT]
Competition Launch Date	September 25/26, 2024
Letter of Intent (LOI) Deadline	January 15, 2025, 8:00 PM
Invitation for Full Application	April 30, 2025
Full Application Deadline	September 15, 2025, 8:00 PM
Notice of Decision	January 15, 2026
Public Funding Announcement	January 2026
Funding Agreements Execution	January - April 2026
Funding Start Date	May 1, 2026

A.1. Goals and Objectives

The Global Cardiovascular Research Funders Forum (GCRFF) is a partnership of 12 research funding organizations[1] across nine countries that have come together to advance, support, and promote transformational international research efforts in cardiovascular disease. In support of its mission, the GCRFF is launching an International Research Challenge (IRC) on Women's Cardiovascular Health. The **overarching goal is to support transformative research in women's cardiovascular health, focusing on one or more areas that represent an unmet medical need of global relevance.** This funding opportunity is structured as an international, multi-institutional, and multi-disciplinary research network grant that brings together experts from around the world to collaboratively execute a research program delivering impacts that no single intuition, country or continent could achieve on its own.

The four program objectives of the IRC are as follows:

1) **New knowledge generation:** Addressing urgent knowledge gaps in women's cardiovascular health, that are of global relevance, through an international, multi-institutional research network;
2) **Impact:** Driving transformational change in care, clinical practice, policies and/or health outcomes for women, with international applicability, through a networked approach to generating new knowledge, leveraging existing knowledge, and mobilizing research findings;
3) **Innovation:** Catalyzing innovation and international collaboration in women's cardiovascular health research through the formation of an international network of scientists and collaborators working together as a team to execute a research program that no single institution, country or continent could deliver on its own; and
4) **Capacity:** Building and strengthening networked research capacity in women's cardiovascular health through strong international collaboration among researchers, clinicians, and collaborators, with

[1] American Heart Association (AHA); British Heart Foundation (BHF); Danish Heart Foundation; Dutch Heart Foundation (Hartstichting); German Centre for Cardiovascular Research (DZHK); Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada (HSFC); Institute of Circulatory and Respiratory Health, Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR-IRCH); Leducq Foundation, USA; National Heart Foundation of Australia; National Heart Foundation of New Zealand; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, National Institute of Health (NIH-NHLBI), USA; Swiss Heart Foundation.

meaningful engagement of people with lived and living experience (PWLLE) and mentorship of early-stage research investigators, and trainees (if included).

A.2. Network Structure

A.2.1 Two-Stage Application Process

This funding opportunity is a two-staged process that includes the Letter of Intent (LOI) and Full Application. The LOI is open to all applicants, but the Full Application is by invitation only (see A.4 Application Instructions).

A.2.2 Grant Value

One (1) grant will be awarded to the highest ranked international research network application. The total grant value will be a maximum of $10 million USD over 5 years. This grant is non-renewable.

A.2.3 Areas of Interest

While there have been major advances in our understanding of women's cardiovascular health in the past decades, significant gaps in research and practice still exist. The generation of new knowledge and uptake of evidence into practice and policies that would benefit women continue to lag behind and/or lack international coordination. To inform the priority areas for the IRC competition, the GCRFF undertook a literature review and three consultative approaches: 1) a consultation with GCRFF members; 2) an international public consultation surveying the international research community, including academics, clinicians and PWLLE; and 3) interviews with leading scientists in the field of women's cardiovascular health research. As a result of this collective feedback, **the IRC will accept applications that propose research programs in areas of women's cardiovascular health that are under-researched and/or require greater understanding**.

Relevant research areas of interest include, but are not limited to, the following areas:

(1) **Research related to risk factors and prevention of cardiovascular disease across women's life stages, including but not limited to:**
- Traditional and sex and/or gender specific risk factors for cardiovascular disease for women across their lifespan;
- Contribution of risk factors, including pregnancy complications, menopause transition, hypertension, diabetes, sleep disturbances, stress, obesity, unhealthy diet, or physical inactivity, to cardiovascular disease in women;
- Critical life stages including puberty, pregnancy, menopause transition, and post-menopause; and/or
- Implementation and evaluation of prevention strategies tailored to the unique risk profiles and life stages of women.

(2) Research related to clinical diagnosis and treatment of conditions more prevalent or with worse outcomes among women, including but not limited to:
- Focus on early detection, clinical diagnosis, and treatment of conditions disproportionately affecting women or where women have poorer outcomes compared to men;
- Consideration of specific conditions including myocardial infarction (MI), spontaneous coronary artery dissection (SCAD), myocardial infarction with non-obstructive coronary arteries (MINOCA), infarction with no obstructive coronary arteries (INOCA), Takotsubo cardiomyopathy, and heart failure with preserved ejection fraction (HFpEF); and/or
- Addressing gaps in sex and/or gender specific diagnosis and treatment within clinical guidelines.

(3) **Research related to sex-specific underlying mechanisms of cardiovascular disease in women, including but not limited to:**
- Exploration of biological and physiological factors that are unique to cardiovascular disease development in women (e.g., molecular mechanisms, hormones, genetics, inflammation, autonomic nervous system); and/or

- Underlying mechanisms that put women at higher risk for certain types of cardiovascular disease.

The network's proposed research program must include a clear path to impacting patient outcomes, which have international applicability across GCRFF member countries, and the potential for wider global relevance. Factors that impact women's cardiovascular health experiences, such as social determinants of health (e.g., sex, gender, ethnicity, culture, age, language, disability, access to care, socioeconomic status, remote/urban) and important life stages (e.g., preconception, pregnancy, menopause transition, and post-menopause) should be considered in the proposed research design, if applicable.

A.2.4 Network Team – Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of the proposed network members are detailed below:

Research Program Leads

Research Program Leads are independent scientists who are responsible for co-creating, executing, and leading the network research program. The Research Program Leads are also jointly responsible for:

- Overseeing the network governance, including facilitating decision-making and conflict resolution, and recruiting new members if additional expertise is required or if members retire;
- Leading components of the proposed research program;
- Overseeing the budget;
- Preparing and submitting detailed budget and progress reports;
- Attending network-wide research program meetings; and
- Supervising trainees (if included in the research program activities).

Note: One (1) Research Program Lead must agree to be the 'designated' Research Program Lead who will submit the application on behalf of the network.

Co-applicants

Co-applicants are independent scientists who make a significant contribution to the intellectual direction of the research program and may also contribute to the network governance. In addition, Co-applicants are responsible for:

- Leading and executing components of the proposed research program;
- Collaborating with the Research Program Leads to provide project-specific budgetary and scientific reporting for the funders;
- Attending network-wide research program meetings; and
- Supervising trainees (if included in the research program activities).

Collaborators

As applicable to the proposed research activities, Collaborators may include researchers, practitioners, PWLLE, policy makers, educators, decision-makers, healthcare administrators, community leaders, individuals in a health charity, patient group, private sector organization or media outlet. Collaborators may be responsible for:

- Providing specialized services including, but not limited to, access to patient populations, access to equipment, provision of specific reagents, training in a specialized technique, or statistical analysis; and/or
- Using the knowledge generated through research to make informed decisions about health policies, programs and/or practices.

Trainees

Trainees (if included in the research program activities) may be from a range of backgrounds, including undergraduates, graduates, post-doctoral fellows (PDFs), or post-health degree fellows (e.g., nursing, physiotherapy, medicine, or dentistry).

Research Program Manager

Networks are encouraged to consider including a Research Program Manager, whose responsibilities will be defined by the network.

A.2.5 Eligibility Criteria

An administrative and relevance review at the LOI and Full Application stages will be conducted to ensure that the proposed network complies with the following eligibility criteria:

a. **Network**: The network must propose a research program in alignment with the overarching goals and objectives of the funding opportunity and relevant research areas (see A.1 Goals and Objectives and A.2.3 Areas of Interest).
b. **Network members:** The network members must include (i) only two (2) Research Program Leads; (ii) Co-applicants, as appropriate for the research activities; and (iii) Collaborators and Trainees, as appropriate to the research activities. Collectively, the Research Program Leads and Co-applicants must be from a minimum of four (4) different GCRFF member organization countries. Networks are encouraged to include investigators at all career stages.
c. **Number of paid institutions:** As a general recommendation, the total number of paid institutions participating in the network should be a minimum of four (4) and maximum of six (6) at which point the network may become more difficult to manage. Networks proposing to include more than six (6) paid institutions should include a rational and management strategy.
d. **Number of Applications:** A network member may be a Research Program Lead on only one (1) application. A network member may participate in up to two (2) applications as i) Research Program Lead on one (1) application and Co-applicant on one (1) application; or ii) as Co-Applicant on both applications.
e. **Research Program Leads:** The two Research Program Leads must be i) from GCRFF countries in two different continents; ii) independent scientists affiliated with an academic research institute from a GCRFF country and eligible to hold grant funding in that country. They may participate as Research Program Leads in only one (1) network proposal. One (1) of the Research Program Leads must be an experienced researcher with a demonstrated track record of leading international research teams.
f. **Co-applicants:** Co-applicants must be independent scientists affiliated with an academic research institute in a GCRFF or non-GCRFF country. Co-applicants may participate in up to two (2) network proposals. They may be from any career stage, but at least one early-stage independent research investigator *who is within five (5) years of their first independent research investigator appointment (minus eligible delays such as illness, maternity leave and parental leave)* must be included.
g. **Collaborators:** Collaborators may be from GCRFF or non-GCRFF member countries. Collaborators are not eligible to be named as Research Program Leads or Co-applicants in the event of a required change in leadership.
h. **Trainees:** If included in the research program, trainees may be from GCRFF or non-GCRFF countries.
i. **Administrative Core:** The Administrative Core will be led at a minimum by the Research Program Leads, a Co-applicant from each participating country, and at least one (1) early-stage independent research investigator.
j. **Conditions of Funding:** The network must adhere to Section 3.4. Conditions of Funding.

A.2.6 Governance Expectations

It is expected that the network will develop an Administrative Core which is responsible for the governance, decision-making, coordination, conflict resolution, and oversight of the network.

a. **Chair:** The Research Program Lead who is an experienced researcher with a demonstrated track record of leading international research teams will serve as Chair of the Administrative Core.

b. **Members:** (i) The Administrative Core will include *at a minimum* by the Research Program Leads, a Co-applicant from each participating country, and at least one (1) early-stage independent research investigator.
c. **Reporting:** The Administrative Core will provide project-specific budgetary and scientific reports to the Research Program Leads who are responsible for preparing and submitting the annual Progress and Financial Reports as well as the Final Report (see B.12 Reporting Requirements).
d. **Changes to the Network during the Grant Tenure:** The Administrative Core must report to the GCRFF any changes to the network's proposed research objectives, membership (i.e. Research Program Leads or Co-applicants or their affiliations), and budget allocations.

A.3. Funding Policies

A.3.1 Grant Term

The GCRFF will fund one (1) research network grant for up to $10M USD over 5 years; the funding is non-renewable. This grant is intended to help create and support the network's research activities; however, it is not expected to be the sole source of support for the research program. It will be important for proposed network members to demonstrate other competitive funding sources (secured, expected or planned) that could expand the network's activities and impact, and/or to sustain the activities beyond the tenure of the grant.

A.3.2 Payment of Funds

On behalf of the GCRFF, the American Heart Association (AHA) will assume financial administration of the grant and make payments to the paid network institutions in their local currencies. Depending on the geographic composition of the network selected for funding, part of the payment may come directly from individual GCRFF member organizations with jurisdictional requirements that entail additional financial reporting obligations. More information will be provided to those invited to the full application stage.

A.3.3 Budgets and Allowable Costs

At the Full Application stage, the designated Research Program Lead will be required to submit: i) an overall budget summary for the network; ii) an additional budget page for each paid institution, including any cash and/or in-kind contributions; and iii) a justification of all budget categories noted in the overall network budget summary. Eligible and non-eligible costs are detailed below.

Direct Costs

Direct costs are essential expenditures that would not have been incurred had the grant not been undertaken. They can be directly assigned to the network activities with a high degree of accuracy. Categories of eligible direct costs include:

Salaries & Benefits

- Research Program Leads, Co-Applicants, and Collaborators (list the salary costs according to the participant's role in the project and include Social Security and other benefits per the policy of the local paid institution); and
- Research Program Manager(s).

Note: Should the compensation of any Research Program Leads and Co-applicants be determined by percentage of the time allocated to the grant, the maximum basic annual salary used for the determination shall not exceed US $200,000. Budgets weighted disproportionately to paying salaries of Research Program Leads and Co-applicants will be viewed unfavorably.

Equipment

- Including major equipment costs (i.e., those costing over 10K US)
- Rental of equipment;
- Operating costs of equipment;
- Computer equipment such as hardware, software, peripherals etc. that have a primary function related to the project, a usable life expectancy over one year, and cost over $500 US; and
- Other equipment costs.

Materials and supplies

- Consumables, and expendable items which are low unit cost and directly related to the functioning of the research program activities. Itemize the cost of supplies by major categories such as chemicals, expendable equipment, etc.

Services

- Professional and technical services;
- Subcontract services include non-animal-related subcontracted services; and
- Animal-related subcontracted costs include production, maintenance and housing of animals (indicate number to be used, unit cost per animal, and cost for daily care in budget).

Knowledge mobilization and communication

- Dissemination of research results (e.g., manuscript publication, meetings, conferences, website design and maintenance); and
- Network communication expenses (e.g., meetings, video conferencing, training, website design and maintenance).

Travel

- Travel and travel-related expenses (e.g., accommodation, flights, and cost per flight) for annual in person network meetings and other activities in support of the network research program; and
- Relevant patient and PWLLE expenses.

Other

- Honoraria for PWLLE contributions; and
- Costs associated with other direct expenses not covered in the above categories.

Indirect Costs

Indirect costs are associated with a paid institution's operational costs (e.g., heating, lighting, ethics reviews, facilities for animals used in research, management of intellectual property, environmental assessment, and safety compliance). The inclusion of indirect costs may not exceed 10% of the total grant budget. Some GCRFF member organizations are restricted from funding indirect costs; more information will be provided to those invited to the full application stage.

Note: Proposed networks are NOT required to include indirect costs in their budget summary or institutional budgets. Applicants are encouraged to adhere to institutional policies and to maximize the allocation of costs towards direct costs of research.

Expenditures Not Covered

Non-eligible expenses related to the proposed research activities include:

- Books/subscriptions;
- Building construction/renovation;
- Staff parking;

- Patient care expenses beyond that required for the research program activities;
- Research personnel recruitment, including luncheons, receptions, meals;
- Professional society dues;
- Tuition/education expenses for degree; and
- Uniforms, apparel, laundry.

A.3.4 Conditions of Funding

The following conditions of funding will apply.

a. **Funding Agreement:** The affiliated institutes for the Research Program Leads and Co-applicants will sign a funding agreement with AHA, which is assuming financial administration of the grant on behalf of the GCRFF. Some affiliated institutes may be required to sign an additional funding agreement with specific GCRFF member organizations due to the jurisdictional requirements on their use of funds.
b. **Co-applicants:** Co-applicants from non-GCRFF countries may receive funds from AHA through their affiliated paid institutions.
c. **Collaborators:** Collaborators from GCRFF and non-GCRFF countries may receive funds through sub-contract arrangements through the Research Program Leads' or Co-applicants' affiliated institutions.
d. **Administrative Core:** The Administrative Core will be required to undertake the following activities to be covered within the network budget:
    (i) Organize at least one (1) annual meeting per year, with two (2) of the annual meetings being in person, with an option for a hybrid format to allow network members to attend remotely;
    (ii) Invite the GCRFF member organizations (at their own cost) to attend the network-wide meetings; and
    (iii) Prepare a yearly Progress Reports, yearly Financial Reports, and a Final Report and submit them to the GCRFF. Report templates will be made available to the designated Research Program Lead at the beginning of the grant funding period and can be filled in as the research progresses.
e. **Restrictions:** The GCRFF will not fund or partner with anyone associated with the tobacco industry or any other health harm related organizations. Excluded and restricted sectors will be identified in the research funding agreements.
f. **Communications:** As the successful network will be well-positioned to explain the role of research in advancing women's cardiovascular health, the network members may be asked by the GCRFF to communicate their research to donors and to the public more broadly.

A.4. Application Instructions

This funding opportunity is a two-stage application process including a Letter of Intent (LOI) and Full Application. The LOI is open to all applicants while the Full Application is by invitation only.

A.4.1 Letter of Intent (LOI)

To submit an LOI, the designated Research Program Lead must create an account on Fluxx, the online grant portal managed by The Leducq Foundation. Once the account is created, the designated Research Program Lead will receive a confirmation notification from Fluxx. Please note that the designated Research Program Lead is the only network member with access to Fluxx.

The link to the LOI instructions are available on the Fluxx portal. In brief, to submit the LOI, the designated Research Program Lead will complete four (4) sections on Fluxx (Project Information, Research Program Leads and Institution Information, Network Members, Reviewers) and upload four (4) PDF files in the LOI Document Uploads: (i) **Research Proposal** (as a single PDF); (ii) **Biosketches** for the Research Program Leads, Co-applicants, and Collaborators who are research investigators (combined into a single PDF); iii) **Letters of Support** for Collaborators (combined into a single PDF); and (iv) **Disclosure Forms** for all network members expected to receive a budget from AHA or other GCRFF member organization (combined into a single PDF).

The designated Research Program Lead must submit the LOI to Fluxx on behalf of the network by Wednesday, January 15, 2025, 8:00 PM, GMT.

A.4.2 Full Application

If the LOI is selected by the GCRFF to advance, the designated Research Program Lead will be provided with a link to the Full Application instructions on Fluxx. The designated Research Program Lead, who submitted the LOI, will login into the Fluxx portal and begin the Full Application.

The link to the Full Application instructions are available on Fluxx. In brief, the designated Research Program Lead will complete and/or update the Project Information sections on Fluxx and upload five (5) PDF files: (i) **Research Plan** (combined into a single PDF); (ii) **Biosketches** for the Research Program Leads, Co-applicants, and Collaborators who are research investigators (combined into a single PDF); iii) **Letters of Support** for Collaborators (combined into a single PDF); (iv) **Disclosure Forms** for all network members expected to receive a budget from AHA or other GCRFF member organization (combined into a single PDF); v) **Network and Institutional Budgets** (in PDF and Excel formats); **and v) Budget Justification** (as a single PDF).

The designated Research Program Lead must download the Research Agreement from Fluxx and share it with the network members and their affiliated paid institutions. The designated Research Program Lead should notify GCRFF via the Fluxx portal of any disputes that members foresee arising with the Research Agreement.

The designated Research Program Lead must submit the Full Application to Fluxx on behalf of the network by Wednesday, September 15, 2025 8:00 PM GMT.

Following submission of the Full Application, the designated Research Program Lead will receive on-screen and email messages from Fluxx confirming the application has been submitted. Please save this message, which will be helpful in case of problems with the submission.

A.5. Review Process

A.5.1 Letter of Intent (LOI)

An administrative review will be performed to assess whether the submitted LOIs comply with the goals and objectives and eligibility criteria of the funding opportunity (see A.1 Goals and Objectives and A.2.5 Eligibility Criteria). Applications deemed ineligible will be withdrawn from the competition. There will be no appeal process for applications deemed ineligible. The International Scientific Review Panel (ISRP) will assess, score and rank the applications based on the four (4) areas of strategic importance noted in A.5.3 Evaluation Criteria; namely, Transformative Impact, Research Excellence, Network Team, and Network Governance. The ISRP will make a recommendation to the GCRFF for up to six (6) LOIs that will be invited to submit a Full Application. The anticipated date for the LOI decision is April 30, 2025 GMT; the designated Research Program Lead will receive the notification and written feedback on the LOI.

A.5.2 Full Application

Following submission of the Full Application, the GCRFF will confirm that the application is still in compliance with A.2.5 Eligibility Criteria. The ISRP will assess, score and rank the applications based on the four (4) areas of strategic importance noted in A.5.3 Evaluation Criteria; namely, Transformative Impact, Research Excellence, Network Team, and Network Governance. The ISRP will make a funding recommendation to the GCRFF. The anticipated date for the Notice of Decision by the GCRFF is January 15, 2026 GMT; all designated Research Program Leads will receive the notification and written feedback on the Full Application.

A.5.3 Evaluation Criteria

The LOI and Full Application will be adjudicated based on the following evaluation criteria: Transformative Impact, Research Excellence, Network Team, and Network Governance.

TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT

- **Knowledge generation and mobilization:** The potential of the research proposed to generate new knowledge and its mobilization to inform health practices and/or policies related to unmet needs in women's cardiovascular health across international jurisdictions;
- **Impact:** Significance of the gap or challenge being addressed, and the potential of the research outcomes and benefits of the research program to drive transformational changes in understanding, diagnosis, care, clinical practice and/or policies for women's cardiovascular health;
- **Innovation:** The network's ability to collaboratively execute the research program and catalyze innovation in women's cardiovascular health research with international applicability and global relevance; and
- **Capacity:** Potential of the network to build and strengthen international, multi-disciplinary collaborative research alliances in women's cardiovascular health demonstrating the ability to meaningfully engage members across all career stages and disciplines in the proposed research and network activities.

RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

- **Research alignment with funding opportunity:** The extent to which the proposed research vision, objectives, and priorities are aligned with the goals and objectives of this funding opportunity;
- **Research Approach:** The level of originality, novelty, clarity and quality of the proposed research hypotheses and methodology;
- **Feasibility:** The feasibility of the proposed activities and the likelihood that the work will be completed within the proposed timeframe;
- **Engagement approach:** The strength of engagement, where appropriate, of patients, PWLLE, caregivers, community, government, policy, health care providers, researchers, clinicians, and industry to achieve the proposed research objectives of the network; and
- **Consideration of intersectional factors:** How intersecting factors (e.g., sex, gender, ethnicity, culture, age, life-stages, language, disability, access to care, socio-economic status, remote/urban location, as appropriate) are considered in the research design and analysis.

NETWORK TEAM

- **Leadership and expertise:** Justification for including the network members, including scientific expertise, demonstrated leadership ability, lived experiences, other meaningful contributions, as well as dedicated time committed to feasibly addressing the proposed research program and the objectives of the funding opportunity;
- **Collaborative approach:** Rationale for, and added value of, the outlined collaborative approach to meet the goal of the funding opportunity and execute the proposed research program;
- **Consideration of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI):** Extent to which the network composition represents diverse perspectives, disciplines, and sectors; and
- **Training and mentorship:** Appropriateness of the time and resources committed to the mentorship, leadership development, and career support of early-stage independent research investigators as well as trainees (if included).

NETWORK GOVERNANCE

- **Structure and decision-making:** Appropriateness of the network's governance, including a well-balanced structure between Research Program Leads and Co-applicants, functioning, management, and decision-making (e.g., appropriate consideration of enablers, including those related to community engagement,

ethics, equity, underrepresented populations, management of patient engagement, mitigation strategies, data management) to achieve the stated goals of the research program;

- **Communications:** Appropriateness of the network communications, including, but not limited to, internal and external communication and coordination, management and administration, conflict prevention and resolution, quality improvement, and academic and community knowledge mobilization approaches among team members;
- **Data management:** Appropriateness of the network to manage, use and protect data, including secondary data use as appropriate, during the grant tenure, and considerations for sustainability beyond the grant; and
- **Resource allocation:** Appropriateness of decision-making and oversight of budget, as well as resource allocation across the network in relation to the feasibility of the proposed activities.

A.5.4 Scoring Rubric

All LOIs and Full Applications will be scored by the ISRP on a scale from 0 to 4.9 and ranked in a top-down order according to the following grading scheme. The fundable range is 3.5 to 4.9.

Rating	Category	Description
4.5 – 4.9	**Outstanding**	All evaluation criteria have been met and the application excels in most relevant aspects. Each criterion has been appropriately and thoroughly addressed. Very minor improvements are recommended. Minimal to no weaknesses.
4.0 – 4.4	**Excellent**	The majority (>80%) of the evaluation criteria have been met and the application excels in many relevant aspects and most criterion have been addressed. Some minor possible changes are recommended. May have some minor weaknesses.
3.5* – 3.9	**Very good**	Many (60-80%) of the evaluation criteria have been met and the application excels in some relevant aspects and reasonably addresses all others. There are moderate areas necessary for improvement, but no major weaknesses.
3.0 – 3.4	**Fair**	Some or limited (40-50%) of the evaluation criteria have been met and the application minimally addresses relevant aspects. Some items have been addressed but there are notable gaps. There are many weaknesses requiring major revisions.
0.0 – 2.9	**Poor**	Not enough (<40%) evaluation criteria have been met. The application fails to provide convincing information and/or has serious inherent flaws or gaps. Needs further development before being competitive in this program.
***Applications rated below 3.5 are NOT eligible for funding**		

B. GENERAL PROGRAM INFORMATION

B.1 Incomplete Submissions

All submissions are considered final. No alterations or changes will be accepted following the application deadline. Incomplete applications will not be admissible to the competition. There will be no appeal process for incomplete submissions.

B.2 Competition Results

Letter of intent (LOI): The anticipated date for the LOI decision is April 30, 2025 GMT; the designated Research Program Leads will receive the notifications and/or invitations to proceed to the full application, as well written feedback from the GCRFF.

Full Application: The anticipated date for the Notice of Decision by the GCRFF is January 15, 2026 GMT; the designated Research Program Leads will receive notification and written feedback from the GCRFF.

B.3 Non-Employee Status

The funding for this grant is deemed to establish neither an employer-employee relationship nor a partnership between the GCRFF and the recipients.

B.4 Communicating Research to the Public and Donors

The successful network needs to be aware that the title of the network and the lay summary could be placed into the public domain or included in GCRFF publications without prior notification. Network members are cautioned not to disclose information that could endanger a proprietary position in these sections. As the successful network is well-positioned to explain the role of research in advancing women's cardiovascular health, the network members may be asked by the funders to communicate research results to the public, e.g. by contributing to funders' articles in traditional and social media and by participating in interviews and meetings with donors.

B.5 Ethical Requirements

By signing and submitting applications to this competition, the successful network members and their affiliated paid institutions undertake the responsibility to ensure any experimentation will be acceptable to the institution on ethical grounds and to comply with local national laws, following guidelines and host institution research policies, as applicable.

B.6 Patent Rights

The funders have no intellectual property (IP) claims on the outputs of the funded research. There will be no IP provisions for revenue sharing if the funded network were to develop new technology/patents. However, network participants must have access to IP that is necessary for the project, and they are expected to develop promising IP that could be used to improve human health. In addition, paid institutions of funded recipients are expected to have appropriate policies in place to protect the IP of the outputs that arise from the funded research.

B.7 Conflict of Interest Policy

At the time of submission of the LOI, all Research Program Leads and Co-applicants are required to declare in the Disclosure Form whether they have any conflicts of interest that would reasonably appear to be affected by the research for which funding is sought, or conflicts of interest related to entities whose financial interests would reasonably appear to be affected by the research. Such conflicts of interest may relate to (a) Significant Financial Interests, (b) Fiduciary Relationships, or (c) Executive Positions. Declaration and management of any conflict of interests during the term of the grant will be handled as stated in the research agreement.

a. **Significant Financial Interest** means anything of monetary value, including but not limited to, salary or other payments for services (consulting fees or honoraria); equity interests (e.g., stocks, stock options or other ownership interests); and intellectual rights (e.g., patents and royalties from such rights). The term does not include:
    - Salary, royalties, or other remuneration from an Investigator's paid Institution;
    - Income from seminars, lectures, or teaching engagements sponsored by public or non-profit entities;
    - Income from service on advisory committees or review panels for public or non-profit entities;
    - An equity interest that when aggregated for the Investigator and the Investigator's spouse and dependent children, meets both of the following tests: does not exceed $15,000 USD in value as determined through reference to public prices or other reasonable measures of fair market value, and does not represent more than a five percent ownership interest in any single entity; or
    - Salary, royalties, or other payments that when aggregated for the Investigator and the Investigator's spouse and dependent children over the next twelve months, are not expected to exceed $15,000 USD.

b. **Fiduciary Relationship** means any position with a business, whether or not for-profit, which subjects an Investigator to a fiduciary duty to such business, including but not limited to, service in an Executive Position or as a member of the Board of Directors or other governing body of such business.
c. **Executive Position** means any position which includes fiduciary and other responsibilities for a material segment of the operation or management of a business. It specifically includes positions with the titles of "Scientific Director" and "Medical Director."

B.8 Open Science and Open Access to Research Outputs Policy

The successful network is required to make their research outputs and findings publicly available as soon as possible, ideally no later than twelve (12) months after research project completion or final publication. The IRC network members should become familiar with the guiding principles that enable sharing data, information, tools and resources, and that respect Indigenous data governance and sovereignty, including:

- FAIR: Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable are guiding principles to inform data management and stewardship of digital assets.
- ClinicalTrials.gov is a database of privately and publicly funded clinical trials around the world.
- PROSPERO is an international database of prospectively registered systematic reviews that have health-related outcomes.
- Data and governance principles as applicable to GCRFF member countries (e.g., CARE, OCAP, etc.)
- International Register of Preclinical Trial Protocols

B.9 Integrity Policy

The primary objective of the GCRFF IRC Integrity Policy is to protect and defend the integrity of the research process and to review allegations of research misconduct in a timely and transparent fashion. The funders are using the following widely held definition of research misconduct: "behaviour or actions that fall short of the standards of ethics, research and scholarship required to ensure that the integrity of research is upheld". Examples of research misconduct include fabrication, falsification, plagiarism or deception in performing, reviewing or reporting research outputs, sexual misconduct or harassment, as well as inadequate acknowledgement and mismanagement of conflict of interest. Research misconduct does not include honest differences that evolve in research from the design, execution or interpretation in evaluating research methods or results, or research of poor quality unless this encompasses the intention to deceive. On behalf of the GCRFF, Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada (HSFC) will administer allegations of research misconduct.

As a condition of funding, the IRC network members agree to comply with the research misconduct provisions and process, as described below:

- Any allegation of research misconduct will be reported by the HSFC to the GCRFF Board (Oversight Committee) to assess if an investigation is warranted. If it is felt that an investigation is required, the HSFC will request that this be conducted by the host institution of the IRC network member considered to have performed the alleged misconduct. In allegations specifically related to the peer review process (not related to disputes about reviewer scoring), the investigation may be conducted jointly by the institution and the HSFC.
- The GCRFF will not act on verbal allegations of misconduct. All allegations must be submitted in writing. Although the confidentiality of persons who submit an allegation of research misconduct will be protected as much as possible, it must be recognized that due process may result in the identity of this person being released to the investigating institution.
- The host institution of the IRC network member considered to have performed the alleged misconduct will be required to submit a written report upon conclusion of the investigation. This report will summarize the findings of the investigation and any future actions that will be undertaken by the institute as a result of the findings.

In cases where misconduct is concluded to have occurred, the GCRFF may apply sanctions against the individual(s) implicated. These sanctions may range from a reprimand letter to a ban from applying for or holding GCRFF funds for a set period of time.

B.10 Policy on Use of Generative AI in IRC Grant Applications and Evaluations

In alignment with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Policy on the Use of Generative AI, the GCRFF recognizes the growing use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, including machine learning and natural language processing, across various sectors for content creation. While these technologies offer significant advantages, they also pose risks, particularly concerning the confidentiality of information, which might inadvertently become part of a public dataset. Applicants for GCRFF research funding must be aware of these risks when considering use of AI tools in the preparation of their applications. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure the accuracy and confidentiality of all information submitted. In addition, applicants are encouraged to be aware of local policies and regulations as they relate to the use of generative AI. To ensure the confidentiality and integrity of all submitted applications, the evaluation of applications will not use any form of generative AI tooling to assist in their review process. For more information on the use of generative AI in grant preparation and evaluation, networks are encouraged to consult the NHMRC Policy on the Use of Generative AI and Peer Review.

B.11 Acknowledging Publications

The GCRFF must be notified in advance of the publication date of any major publications arising from the funded research by email to the HSFC at **research@heartandstroke.ca**. The IRC network members must acknowledge the support of the GCRFF in all scientific communications and press releases related to their grant with the following wording:

"This work was supported by the Global Cardiovascular Research Funders Forum (GCRFF), an innovative arrangement between the American Heart Association (AHA); British Heart Foundation (BHF); The Danish Heart Foundation; Dutch Heart Foundation (Hartstichting); German Centre for Cardiovascular Research (DZHK); Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada (HSFC); Canadian Institutes of Health Research - Institute of Circulatory and Respiratory Health (CIHR-ICRH Canada); Leducq Foundation, Bahamas and USA; National Heart Foundation of Australia; National Heart Foundation of New Zealand; National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NIH-NHLBI), USA; Swiss Heart Foundation".

B.12 Reporting Requirements

The designated Research Program Lead will be sent the report templates within the first year of grant funding. With assistance from the Administrative Core, the Research Program Leads are responsible for preparing and submitting: i) an annual consolidated Financial Report for the reporting period; ii) an annual Progress Report for the reporting period; and iii) a Final Report.

- **Annual Progress Reports** must be submitted to the GCRFF by the designated Research Program Lead no later than 30 days after the end of each funding year (e.g., if grant funding start date is [month, day, year] the reports would be due [month +1, day, year +1].
- **Annual Financial Reports** must be submitted to the GCRFF no later than 30 days after the end of each funding year (e.g., if grant funding start date is [month, day, year] the reports would be due [month +1, day, year +1].
- A **Final Report** must be submitted by the designated Research Program Lead to the GCRFF no later than six (6) months after completion/termination of the grant funding.

The designated Research Program Lead can expect to receive communication from the GCRFF within sixty (60) business days if any issues of concern are identified with any of the required reports.

B.13 Program Delivery

On behalf of the GCRFF, the HSFC will manage the IRC competition, peer review process, and post-grant activities. The American Heart Association (AHA) will administer the grant funds. As detailed in the funding agreement, some GCRFF member organizations may also be responsible for administering funds directly to network members located in their jurisdiction.

The following funding conditions will apply:

- **Payments:** Each paid institution (affiliated with the network member who submitted a budget) will receive quarterly payments, as detailed in the Research Agreement.
- **Extensions:** At the end of the grant term, the designated Research Program Lead may request a carry-forward of unspent funds for one additional year beyond the approved term of the grant.
- **Unspent funds:** Fund that are unused beyond the term of the grant, or beyond an additional one-year extension if applicable, must be returned (as described in the Research Agreement).
- **Policy infringement:** In the case of any infringement on the regulations and/or policies outlined in the Program Description and as agreed upon in the Research Agreement, the institute affiliated with the funded network will be responsible for returning the funds received and shall not receive the remaining funds.
- **Termination of grant:** The GCRFF reserves the right to terminate the grant should it be determined that the network is not meeting the expectations outlined in the Program Description.

B.14 Use of Personal Information

Personal information submitted during the application process will be made available to the GCRFF for the purposes of future program design and delivery, results measurement, and reporting. All Annual Progress Reports and the Final Report will be shared with the GCRFF member organizations and partners supporting the grant (See A.3.4 Conditions of Funding for report details).

B.15 Contact Information

For any questions or concerns, the preferred form of communication is email. Emails will go to a research email inbox which is accessed by multiple research team members and is the best way to get a timely response.

Questions related to the *IRC Program Description*, *LOI* and *Full Application Instructions* should be directed to the HSFC at research@heartandstroke.ca.

Questions related to the Fluxx portal should be directed to the Leducq Foundation office at contact@flcq.org or viewed on the website at: www.flcq.org.

B.16 GCRFF Member Organizations

American Heart Association (AHA)
British Heart Foundation (BHF)
Danish Heart Foundation
Dutch Heart Foundation (Hartstichting)
German Centre for Cardiovascular Research (Deutsches Zentrum für Herz-Kreislauf-Forschung or DZHK)
Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada (HSFC)
Institute of Circulatory and Respiratory Health, Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR)
Leducq Foundation (Bahamas and USA)
National Heart Foundation of Australia
National Heart Foundation of New Zealand
National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, National Institute of Health (NIH-NHLBI) (USA)
Swiss Heart Foundation

B.17 GCRFF Member Organization Countries

Australia
Bahamas
Canada
Denmark
Germany
Great Britain

Netherlands
New Zealand
Switzerland
United States of America (USA)

Acronyms

Term	Acronym
American Heart Association	AHA
International Research Challenge	IRC
International Scientific Review Panel	ISRP
Global Cardiovascular Research Funders Forum	GCRFF
Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada	HSFC
Letter of Intent	LOI
People with lived and living experience	PWLLE

Definitions

Term	Definition
Co-applicants	Independent scientists who participate in the co-creation and execution of the scientific program and contribute to the network administration.
Collaborators	As applicable to the proposed research activities, Collaborators may include researchers, practitioners, PWLLE, policy makers, educators, decision-makers, healthcare administrators, community leaders, individuals in a health charity, patient group, private sector organization or media outlet.
Early-stage independent research investigator	Scientists who are within five (5) years of their first independent research investigator appointment (minus eligible delays such as illness, maternity leave and parental leave).
Multi-disciplinary	Refers to network members from different disciplines working together, each drawing on their disciplinary knowledge.
Research Program Leads	Independent scientists from GCRFF member organization countries who are responsible for co-creating, executing, and leading the network research program.
Trainee	Trainees, if included in the proposed network, may be from a range of backgrounds, including undergraduates, graduates, post-doctoral fellows, or post-health degree fellows (e.g., nursing, physiotherapy, medicine, dentistry).