
Organic Science Cluster 4: Letter of Intent Guidelines for Researchers

Introduction

Organic Science Cluster 4 (OSC4; 2023-2028) is a joint initiative led by the [Organic Federation of Canada](#) in collaboration with the [Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada](#) at Dalhousie University to serve the needs of Canada's organic sector. This letter of intent (LOI) process is being conducted in anticipation that Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's (AAFC) next policy framework for 2023-2028 will include another Science Cluster Initiative, and that there will be an open call for proposals. The OSC is strategic, coordinated proposal submitted to the federal government. See the [OSC4](#), website for details and updates.

Purpose of this Letter of Intent

- i. Provide an opportunity for researchers to express their interest in being part of OSC4.
- ii. Screen (and provide direction on) proposed research for its relevance and potential impact on the organic sector based on:
 - a. how the Activity will strategically address organic sector priorities (see the 2021 Canadian Organic Research Priorities document),
 - b. linkage AAFC national research priorities (Environment, Economic Growth, Resilience)
 - c. the novel scientific contribution the research will make,
 - d. the level of industry collaboration and support,
 - e. the level of collaboration, and cross-Canada relevance,
 - f. the preliminary plans to communicate the results and measure the impact of the research.

Scientific merit, design, feasibility (including the experience level of the team), budget and likelihood of success will be evaluated in detail at the proposal stage. Applicants submitting the LOI will be provided with comments/feedback, and those LOIs accepted by the evaluation committee will be invited to submit a full proposal.

Who Can Apply?

- University/college scientists in Canada
- Government scientists in Canada
- Other public research institutions
- Private sector researchers in Canada (with restrictions)

What Types of Research Will Be Considered?

The OSC program's focus is natural sciences research. LOIs will not be accepted with a main focus on: social sciences, marketing/market development, public trust, aquaculture, international development, or regulatory work. More details in Section 7 below.

Budget

Total budgets of up to \$2 million with a target range of 35-50% industry matching will be considered. More details in Sections 1 and 4 below.

Projected Timeline

Letters of Intent will be reviewed and successful submissions will be invited to prepare a full workplan (proposal) for the proposed Research Activity. The workplans will undergo peer review and OSC Science Advisory Body Review in summer/fall 2022. Those that are accepted into the OSC4 overarching proposal will be submitted to AAFC for technical and programs review in early 2023.

Activity	Start Date	End Date
Priority Setting	Oct 2021	Dec 2021
Letter of Intent (LOI, i.e. preproposal)	Jan 2022	Feb 2022
LOI Review	Feb 2022	Apr 2022
Full Workplans	Apr 2022	Jun 2022
Workplan Review (Peer Review & Science Advisory Body)	Jun 2022	Sep 2022
Deadline for Confirming Industry Funds	Oct 2022	
Workplan Revisions and Review	Sep 2022	Nov 2022
OSC4 Proposal Compilation - Submission	Nov 2022	Jan 2023
Cluster 4 Program Start Date	Apr 2023	Mar 2028

Deadline for submission is **February 4, 2022**

Each LOI should include:

- Completed LOI form as a **Microsoft Word** document that **does not exceed 4 pages**,
- All participants in the research who have been confirmed as interested must be cc'd on the LOI submission including co-P.I.s, co-investigators and collaborating extension/industry specialists and industry partners identified as 'interest confirmed' listed in the LOI **MUST** be cc'd on your email submission.

Submit the completed LOI and accompanying documents to: organic.submissions@dal.ca

For more information:

See the OSC4 website: www.dal.ca/OACC/OSC4

Margaret Graves – Program Manager (902-896-3481), gravesm@dal.ca OR

Nicole Boudreau – Organic Federation of Canada (514-488-6192),
nicole.boudreau@organicfederation.ca

Dr. Andrew Hammermeister – Director, OACC (902-893-8037), andrew.hammermeister@dal.ca

Instructions follow....

LOI Form Instructions

Section 1 – Title, Location, Subject Area and Budget

The title of the Activity should be precise and concise while still describing the work to be done.

State the location(s) where the work will occur and specify the subject area as appropriate (e.g. Horticulture: *Fruit – strawberries*).

Define the length of the proposed Activity and expected start date (earliest: April 1, 2023).

Provide an estimate of the projected total budget (i.e. for the whole time frame of the Activity, for all sources of funding) necessary to complete the Activity. Budget considerations:

- The budget plan at the LOI stage is intended to give an overall impression of the magnitude of the research, it may be adjusted at the full proposal stage within the guidance of the review committee.
- Detailed budgets (by collaborator, year, cost category and source) will be requested in the full proposal submission.
- Total budgets ranging from \$200,000 to \$2 million will be considered but may be adjusted by the LOI Review Committee. Size of budget should be proportional to scope of work, potential impact and level of inter-institutional collaboration. (Note: average size of budgets was <\$500k in OSC3)
- Salaries of government paid employees are not eligible.
- All costs must be incremental expenses (i.e., would not have been incurred if the Activity did not exist).
- This is not a capital investment program; capital purchases over \$5000 will need special justification assessment. Equipment purchases must be specifically needed for this OSC4 Activity (i.e. not to support other work).
- **Details about matching funding are provided in Section 4 below.**

Section 2 – Research Activity Principal Investigator (or Co-P.I.s)

The Activity Principal Investigator (researcher) is the applicant and is responsible for proposal submission and reporting, along with the primary deliverables of the Activity. The Principal Investigator will also be the primary contact with the administrators of the Cluster.

Researchers within established government, educational, and other public research institutions may apply. Private sector researchers are encouraged to partner with public research institutions and must expect results to be published and disseminated.

Notes:

- The work must be based in Canada and relevant to the Canadian organic sector; international collaborators may be included if their expertise is required, however, no Cluster funds will leave Canada.
- Proposed research activities must provide strategic benefit to the organic sector and should not necessarily support individual businesses.

Section 3 – Co-investigators

All co-investigators listed must be cc'd on your email submission to show they have seen the LOI.

Name the other researchers (and organizations) who will be involved in the Activity. Add extra lines if necessary. These are the collaborating researchers who will receive a portion of the budget, or who will be making a substantial direct contribution to the work. The researchers listed must be aware that this LOI is being submitted and must be cc'd on the email submission to ensure this. **Collaboration between AAFC and university researchers is strongly encouraged. Research should not be duplicated; it is strongly encouraged that LOIs demonstrate a high level of coordination and collaboration across Canada.**

Section 4 – Collaborating Industry Partners

Provide the name of the partner(s) from whom you are expecting to receive matching contributions and indicate the nature of their contribution if known (cash or in-kind). Add extra lines if necessary. **If they have confirmed interest, please check the “Interest confirmed” box and cc them on your email LOI submission.**

The Organic Science Cluster is intended to provide coordinated research serving the strategic needs of the organic sector. In a highly competitive environment for research funds, it is critical that the research has impact and as such is supported by industry collaborators. A connection between industry sponsors of research and the scientists increases the likelihood that the research will be relevant and the results will be disseminated with impact.

At the LOI stage, it is recommended that one or more industry collaborator(s) is identified. LOI submissions that identify industry collaborators with cash support will be looked upon favourably, however, formal letters of support will not be required until October 2022.

Industry matching considerations:

Details of the matching funding requirement for the Cluster program will not be known until AAFC releases the program guidelines. This is an important consideration since the organic sector does not have a national levy or check-off program for organic research (unlike some other commodity groups). This means that industry matching must be secured on an activity by activity basis.

- Matching requirements in the final proposal may vary among research Activities depending on AAFC funding program guidelines (when released), nature of the work, and benefit to stakeholders.
- For the LOI stage, researchers are requested to target **matching contributions of between 35% and 50%** of the total Activity budget from non-government sources. Lower matching ratios may be considered if the proposal is dedicated to enhancing environmental performance.
- A maximum of 10% of your total budget can be in-kind (ex. \$100,000 total budget must have minimum \$35,000 industry matching of which maximum \$10,000 can be in kind).
- In the 3rd cluster program, AAFC required that certain types of project have a 50% industry match (ex. close to commercialization, variety development), so be aware that any research activity submitted may be required to have more than 35% matching.
- Joint proposals to a commodity group for multiple Activities will be facilitated by OSC management. Otherwise, researchers will be expected to secure matching industry contributions for their Activities.
- Commitments of industry matching funds may not be possible at this stage, but confirmation of interest is strongly encouraged. Provide realistic targets from potential industry partners.

Two types of matching contributions:

1. Cash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly preferred; sent directly to OSC4 via research contract with the partner, for reimbursement of eligible research expenses
2. In-kind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The industry partner provides support that does not include cash commitments or expenses but documentation of valuation of in-kind may be requested Requires clear documentation at the full proposal stage and throughout the research program Requires annual documentation and will require the industry partner's and the researcher's time completing paperwork

Section 5 – Collaborating Extension Specialists or Industry Professionals

All collaborating specialists must be cc'd on your email submission to show they have seen the LOI.

If an extension specialist has already been contacted and is interested in participating in the Activity, provide their name and affiliation and cc them on your email LOI submission. Add extra lines if necessary.

The intent of the Cluster is to have impact on the organic sector. Experience has shown that Activities are more likely to be relevant and to have impact if extension specialists and/or an extension specialist is included as a collaborator. This may not apply to all research Activities.

Section 6 – Priority Areas

Research should directly address the [2021 Canadian Organic Research Priorities](#) and work towards achieving outcomes that specifically address one or more core priorities of Climate Change/Environment, Economic Growth, and/or Resilience.

Climate & Environment	Economic Growth	Resilience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •C sequestration, GHG emissions •Recycling organic waste •Biodiversity •Clean air & water •Plastic waste 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Productivity •Profitability •Reduced costs •Technologies •Value-adding, new attributes •Improved market access •New attributes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Climate adaptation •Soil and plant health •Animal welfare •Public trust •Adaptation to labour shortages •Adaptation to market pressures •Farmer resilience

Section 7 – Research Objectives and Approach

This overview should include a defined research problem or opportunity, explaining how the project will address a gap in the organic sector. The project should be clearly results-oriented, linking the work with results that can be applied in the sector.

- General and specific objectives should be provided (these may change slightly in the full proposal).
- Research proposals should be hypothesis-driven where possible.
- A brief description of the planned research should be provided, outlining where the research will be conducted and what kind of work is being done (field, lab, greenhouse).
- References should be provided as footnotes below the text (limit of 3 key references).

A description of the novel scientific contributions expected from the Activity is required. How is this research innovative for the sector? The applicant will build on previous work and will not repeat work that has already been done.

Research design considerations:

- Research must address Canadian organic research priorities.
- Projects must be relevant to the unique needs and market of the organic sector. Thus it would be expected that the research works within the scope of the [Canadian Organic Standards](#) and [Permitted Substances Lists](#), unless specifically addressing potential changes to the standards. Production research should be carried out in operations that are managed organically (if not certified organic) as appropriate for the research.
- This program focusses on natural sciences research. LOIs will not be accepted that focus on: social sciences, marketing/market development, public trust, aquaculture, international development, or regulatory work. These areas of work can be included as a minor component within a natural sciences proposal to complement the core research and maximize impact.
- Impact potential – as a national research program with public funding, the research should have high likelihood of adoption of valuable research outcomes by many stakeholders (i.e., not specific to one operation)
- Continuing research - Priority may be given to the continuation/completion of Activities from the previous Cluster, providing that they remain an industry priority.

Section 8 – Anticipated Impacts on the Organic Sector, Stakeholders and Producers

Provide an overview of how the research will impact which stakeholders in the organic sector and beyond:

- What are the specific expected outcomes of this research?
- How do they relate to the sector priorities?
- Who specifically will benefit and how?
- What is the scope of impact expected to be (# operators, acres, potential economic value)?
- How are the research outcomes addressing critical needs within farming systems?
- How does the research increase profitability, capture a new opportunity, reduce risk, enhance competitiveness, and/or improve public trust?

At the full proposal stage researchers will be asked how they would expect to measure the impacts of their research after the project is over.

Section 9 – Knowledge Transfer Plan to End Users (extension professionals, producers, etc.)

Give a brief overview of how the results of this research will be disseminated to the organic sector to ensure that they are adopted. Indicate potential partnerships that will support this knowledge dissemination. In the LOI give an overview of who will be involved in knowledge transfer and how as well as what approaches will be taken. A communication plan will be expected in the full proposal.

Note: End users should be the target of the communication plan.

Section 10: Involvement of the Collaborating Industry Partner(s)

Will the industry partner be integrated at each stage of the Activity (i.e. writing of the proposal, research implementation and communication strategy)? Describe the interaction between the principal investigator or co-investigators and the industry partner at each stage of the Activity if pertinent.

Deadline for submission is **February 4, 2022**

Each LOI should include:

- Completed LOI form as a **Microsoft Word** document that **does not exceed 4 pages**,
- All participants in the research who have been confirmed as interested must be cc'd on the LOI submission including co-P.I.s, co-investigators and collaborating extension/industry specialists and industry partners identified as 'interest confirmed' listed in the LOI MUST be cc'd on your email submission.

Submit the completed LOI and accompanying documents to: organic.submissions@dal.ca

For more information:

See the OSC4 website: www.dal.ca/OACC/OSC4

Margaret Graves – Program Manager (902-896-3481), gravesm@dal.ca) OR

Nicole Boudreau – Organic Federation of Canada (514-488-6192),
nicole.boudreau@organicfederation.ca

Dr. Andrew Hammermeister – Director, OACC (902-893-8037, andrew.hammermeister@dal.ca)