

Call for innovative projects

Phase 3 – 2021-2024

The International Observatory on the Societal Impacts of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Technologies (OBVIA) is launching the third phase of its call for innovative projects with a total budget of \$CA 1,000,000 to support projects for up to three years with a total budget of maximum \$CA 125,000. In order to support early career researchers, this phase will fund a minimum of two projects submitted by early career researchers¹.

ABOUT OBVIA

OBVIA is an open research network that brings together the expertise of more than 220 researchers in the Humanities and Social Sciences, Science and Engineering, and Health. It is also an open space for discussion and reflection for all stakeholders in the development and use of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies.

Centred around a critical interrogation of technological innovations, the Observatory's mission is to raise crucial issues and identify plausible solutions for the problems and opportunities stemming from the rise of AI and digital technology in the province of Quebec and elsewhere in the world.

OBVIA aims to contribute to the common good that must be pursued through digital innovation. Via knowledge production and research-creation projects, OBVIA addresses technology's benefits to society and engages democratic institutions.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

OBVIA promotes and integrates the values of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in all of its activities. An open and diverse community promotes the inclusion of the voices of those who have been under-represented or discouraged. OBVIA welcomes individuals/projects who/that have demonstrated their commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion values and will help us increase our capacity for diversity in the broadest sense. We encourage applications from groups members who have been marginalized for any of the reasons listed in the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms (CHRF), including gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression,

¹ Researcher within five years from the date of their first research-related appointment, excluding justified delays in research. A research-related appointment is defined as one where the individual has the autonomy to conduct research independently. All eligible leaves of absence (maternity leave, parental leave, medical leave and bereavement leave) may be deducted from the period. Professional leaves (training, sabbatical, administrative leave) are not deducted.

racialization, disability status, political belief, religion, family status, age, First Nations, Metis or Inuit status or Indigenous status.

OBJECTIVES OF THE CALL

- Support research and creation on responsible innovation and the major societal transformations associated with AI and digital technologies (NumerIA) and the dynamics that structure them.
- Support the development of research teams likely to conduct research on the societal impacts of NumerIA, while attracting early career researchers.
- Supporting cross-sectoral projects of importance for Quebec and for other societies facing the same issues in terms of the societal impacts of AI and digital technologies.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- A principal investigator must be a Researcher member of OBVIA.
- At least two other researchers must also be Researcher member of OBVIA.
- The project must be based on the concept of responsible innovation.
- The project must contribute at least to two different OBVIA's research themes (Arts, Media and Cultural Diversity; Industry 4.0, Work and Employment; Environment, Smart Cities, Territory and Mobility; International Relations, Humanitarian Action and Human Rights; Ethics, Governance and Democracy; Law, Cyberjustice and Cybersecurity; Education and Empowerment; and Sustainable Health).
- The project must propose explicit links with at least one of OBVIA's three functions other than Research and Creation (*Monitoring and Survey; Deliberation; Public Policy*).

EVALUATION CRITERIA

- **Research and creation.** Precision of the project, its hypotheses and methodology, and their coherence with OBVIA's mission. Quality of the principal investigators' and co-investigators' CVs.
- **Team, attraction, training and retention of research actors.** Support for the next research generation. Relevance and justification of the size and complementarity of the team.
- **Capacity for scientific growth.** Potential for societal impacts and creative outreach.
- **Stimulation of partnerships and networking.** Active participation of collaborators and partners is strongly encouraged. The main focus need to remain on the development of knowledge that contributes to the common good, not to the interests of organizations and companies.
- **Knowledge mobilization.** The project must demonstrate a strong potential for knowledge mobilization and transfer.

EVALUATION PROCESS

OBVIA ensures that its decisions are fair and objective, and that they are perceived as such. The evaluation process is carried out by an independent evaluation committee with the participation of international reviewers and validated by the co-heads of the Research and Creation function and by OBVIA's Scientific Committee.

CALENDAR

- December 9th, 2020: Launch of the call for projects - Phase 3
- March 1st, 2021, **4:59 p.m. (EST)** : Submission deadline
- March-May 2021 : Evaluation
- End of May 2021 : Results

APPLY

All project proposals must be submitted by email as a single document to projets@observatoire-ia.ulaval.ca. The deadline for submission is Monday, March 1st 2021 at 4:59 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST).

For more information about OBVIA and this call for innovative projects, please contact :

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Appendix A – Guidelines for Project Submission

General informations

The project proposal provides information about your project in relation to OBVIA's mission, objectives and specific themes identified in the call for projects. Your proposal will be evaluated according to OBVIA's research project evaluation criteria. It is the responsibility of the applicants to ensure that their application meets the following eligibility criteria and evaluation criteria. Submissions that do not meet the eligibility criteria will be rejected.

Language: You can complete your application in French or English.

Deadline: Project proposals must be submitted by **March 1st 2021 at 4:59 p.m. Eastern Standard Time(EST)**. An acknowledgement of receipt will be sent within 48 hours of receipt of the proposal.

Submission: All project proposals must be submitted in a single file by email to projets@observatoire-ia.ulaval.ca and must include IN THIS ORDER:

- The submission form (available on [OBVIA's website](#) in .docx version);
- CVs of principal and co-investigators (two-page CVs);
- Letters of support from partners, if applicable;
- Illustrations and/or graphics may be included in the appendix.

Submission content

The project must be presented in the submission form available on the [OBVIA website](#).

1) Title

The title should clearly and concisely state the purpose of the project. The title of the project will be used for promotional and communication purposes by OBVIA.

2) Research themes

Indicate in which research themes (at least two themes) your project fits and how the knowledge will contribute to these themes:

- Arts, Media and Cultural Diversity;
- Industry 4.0, Work and Employment;
- Environment, Smart Cities, Territory and Mobility;
- International Relations, Humanitarian Action and Human Rights;
- Ethics, Governance and Democracy;
- Law, Cyberjustice and Cybersecurity;
- Education and Empowerment;
- Sustainable Health.

The information relating to the research themes, the co-leaders of these themes as well as their affiliated researchers are available on the [OBVIA website](#).

3) Summary (300 words max.)

Please provide a summary of your project (300 words maximum) that describes the main elements of the proposed research, the nature of the activities to be funded and the anticipated benefits. This summary will be used in the selection process, as well as for OBVIA communication purposes.

4) Team

OBVIA will fund projects led by interdisciplinary teams involving partners both internal and external to OBVIA. The team is mainly evaluated on the relevance and justification of its size and its complementarity.

A principal investigator must be a Research member of OBVIA.

At least two other researchers on the team must also be Research members of OBVIA.

Collaborations between researchers from two or more research themes are encouraged. The principal investigators must obtain the agreement of all team members before submitting the application. All co-investigators and collaborators must complete a specific [consent form](#).

The **role in the application** defines the level of participation and responsibility of those jointly involved in a project². There are three different roles :

a. Principal Investigator

A principal investigator is a regular research member of OBVIA and ensures the scientific direction of the project or research program for which funding is requested.

A Principal Investigator may submit only one project under this call as a Principal Investigator.

If there are two principal investigators identified on the project, the first one identified in the team section has administrative responsibility for the application, including correspondence with OBVIA, and financial responsibility for the grant. Academic researchers, clinical academics and college researchers are eligible in this role.

b. Co-investigator

A co-investigator is a researcher participating in the grant application, whose CV is required and taken into account in the scientific evaluation. He/she contributes significantly or brings specific expertise to the proposed research project.

c. Collaborator

A collaborator is a person identified by the principal investigator as bringing specific expertise to the research project or program for which funding is requested.

² In accordance with the [Common General Rules of](#) the FRQ.

5) Context and objectives (max. 1 page)

Set the context of your research project in relation to OBVIA's mission and objectives. Please describe the objectives of your research, how interdisciplinary collaborations between researchers, students and postdoctoral fellows will be established (if applicable), and the main societal issues addressed by your research project.

6) Approach, methodology, newness and inter-research themes (max. 2 pages)

Provide a summary of the methodology and expected results of your research project in relation to the societal impacts of AI and digital technologies. Emphasize the originality and the novelty of the proposed research, in terms of hypothesis/research questions addressed, new methodology and/or new applications of current methods. Highlight the level of integration and coherence of the team, the complementarity of their expertise, and the value of the proposed interdisciplinary collaborations. Describe how the produced knowledge will contribute to OBVIA research themes identified above.

7) Impacts/Mobilization and transfer of knowledge and links with OBVIA functions (max. 1½ pages)

Describe the knowledge mobilization and transfer efforts related to at least one of OBVIA's functions other than Research and Creation (Monitoring and Survey, Public Deliberation, Public Policy) to reach the different audiences. It is not necessary to involve the co-lead of these functions upstream of the project nor to list them as co-investigators. Indicate how the results of your research will have an impact on **responsible innovation** and the development of plausible solutions, while maximizing the positive effects and minimizing negative effects of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital technologies.

8) Attraction and training of young scientists (max. ½ page)

Briefly describe the ability of the research team and the proposed project to train graduate students or postdoctoral fellows in an interdisciplinary environment.

9) Budget

Only principal and co-investigators who are OBVIA members are eligible to receive a portion of OBVIA's funding, in accordance with the FRQ rules.

The total budget available for all projects funded under this call is \$CA 1,000,000 for the period 2021-2024. A maximum total of \$CA 125,000 may be requested per research project for up to three years.

In the application form, you must detail the budget requested for your project on an annual basis and for each budget item.

For each budget item, you must provide a brief description and justification.

Explain the contributions that your partners and collaborators will make to your project. Please note that a letter of support from your partners is required and must be joined to the application.

10) References (max. 2 pages)

Present relevant references and recent documentation related to your project.

11) Short resume and support letters from partners

The principal and co-investigators of the project must provide a short CV (PDF format; maximum of two pages) that summarizes, in relation to the project and **in this order** :

- their academic and/or professional training;
- their relevant expertise and experience in relation to the project;
- their scientific or other achievements related to the project.

You must join a support letter from each of your partners to your submission (PDF format).

Appendix B – Criteria for Evaluating Research Projects

- **The research team (15%)**
 - Experience and leadership skills of the co-principal investigators of the project according to career stage. Expertise, complementarity and achievements of the co-investigators and collaborators, as demonstrated by the training experience and scientific productivity of the last five years (publications, grants held, etc.).
 - Ability of researchers and their collaborators to disseminate the results of their research (publications, conferences, presentations, media coverage) and to reach the society or actors concerned in an original way.
 - Ability of the team to conduct interdisciplinary research.
 - Ability of the team to train Highly Qualified Personnel (HQP) in an interdisciplinary environment.

- **The degree of scientific and social relevance to the overall objectives of the targeted call and the added value (15%)**
 - Ability to demonstrate how the project fits with the concept of responsible innovation.
 - Ability to address different axes and one of the functions (other than the Research and Creation function)
 - Ability to clarify the understanding of the societal impacts of AI and digital.
 - Advancement of knowledge in emerging fields.

- **The budget (10%)**
 - Justification of the level, nature and duration of funding requested in relation to the objectives and milestones identified in the proposal.
 - Clarity and relevance of each of the budget items.
 - Appropriateness of the budget, including the funds requested from OBVIA, contributions from other sources and the potential leverage of OBVIA's funding.

- **Research and creation: the precision of the project, its hypotheses and methodology and their consistency with the mission of the Observatory (20%)**
 - Originality of the proposed research with respect to the hypotheses and questions proposed, the development of innovative and/or emerging and/or methodological research and justification of their links with OBVIA's mission and axes.
 - Significance and significance of one or more anticipated impacts (social, economic, technological, or related to health and well-being) of the proposed research.
 - Clarity of short- and long-term objectives, research approach and methodology.

- **Attraction, training and retention of scientific actors (10%)**
 - Number of Highly Qualified Personnel (HQP) funded and trained in relation to the budget and scope of the project.
 - A training strategy that encourages HQP interactions with other project participants in various fields of expertise in order to foster collaboration and interdisciplinary training.
 - Potential to expose students to the practical aspects of research by encouraging the active participation of academic, public and private partners in the training process, including internships, co-supervision and joint workshops.

- **The capacity for scientific growth: the potential benefits of the project and its creative influence (10%)**
 - The project must have a clear and coherent plan with clearly identified milestones that demonstrate a high probability of achieving its objectives (including recruitment) within the funding period.

- **Stimulating collaborations and networking: complementarity and networking between OBVIA researchers and their partners (10%)**
 - The appropriateness of the researchers and their collaborators to conduct the proposed research, in terms of the complementarity of expertise and the potential for synergy.
 - Existence, nature and extent of contributions from the private, public or not-for-profit sectors.
 - Opportunity for international collaboration and outreach.

- **Knowledge mobilization: the potential for knowledge transfer (10%)**
 - Identification of the means planned to foster active and innovative knowledge mobilization and relevance of the planned links with OBVIA's functions other than Research and Creation.
 - Potential for knowledge mobilization and transfer activities and participation in digital literacy and increased awareness of the societal impacts of AI and digital literacy.

Appendix C – Evaluation Process, Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality

Please refer to the French version for more information about the evaluation process, conflicts of interest and confidentiality.

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