CANADIAN FOOD INNOVATION NETWORK

FOODTECH NEXT
2025-2026 PROGRAM CYCLE

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Canadian Food Innovation Network

Who We Are

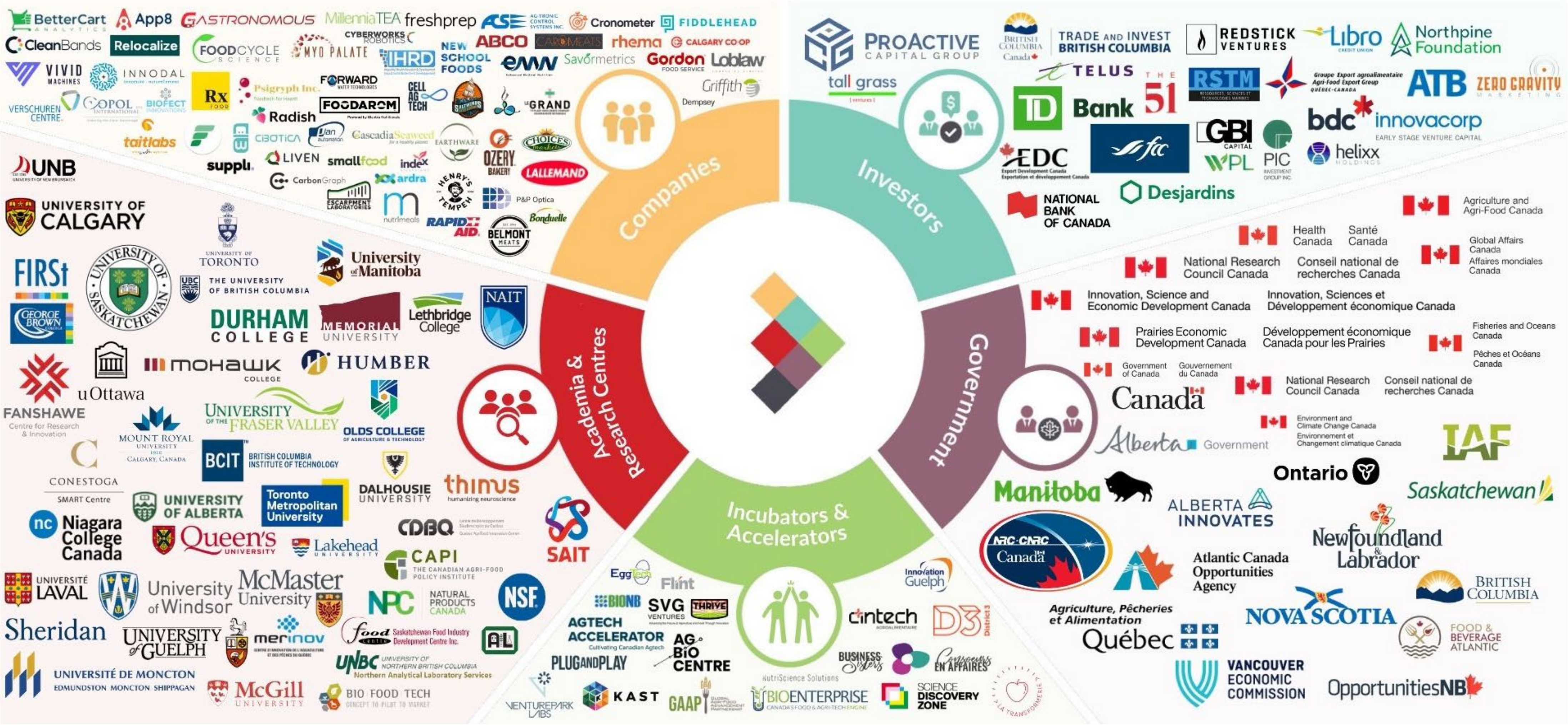
The Canadian Food Innovation Network (CFIN) has built the fastest growing and most engaged food business community in the country and our members come from across the globe, representing all parts of the food value chain.

We fund transformative foodtech projects, stimulate collaboration, and foster a growing community of food and beverage professionals.

Three Things you need to know about CFIN

- Our members care about using innovation to grow food manufacturing, foodservice and food retail businesses.
- We connect our members to new ideas, opportunities, and technologies to increase collaboration and position Canada as a global leader in food innovation.
- Our team is distributed nation-wide and brings innovation support to all regions, commodities and types of businesses working post farm gate to all the way to the dinner plate.

Meet Some of Our Members



The CFIN Difference

Regional Innovation Directors

Regional Innovation Directors are situated across the country and **provide our members with local support and national solutions.**

YODL

YODL is our **member-exclusive innovation** playground that connects food professionals to unique insights, resources, and partners.

Unique Funding Opportunities

CFIN's funding programs **drive Canadian food innovation**, foster collaboration, and deliver economic benefits.

Foodtech Next Program

- Foodtech Next applicants have established their product-market fit, know what is needed to validate and sell their technology, and are looking to demonstrate their solution in the food sector.
- Up to $250K support for a max 18-month demonstration project.
- Focused on the post-farm gate supply chain – the primary benefactors of your project must be food and beverage manufacturers, distributors, restaurants, foodservice, grocery retail, or even consumers. Solutions that primarily impact farmers are NOT eligible for CFIN funding.

Innovation Priorities

Smart Product And Process Development

- Health, nutrition & wellness benefits
- Emerging science such as cultured protein or “green” proteins
- Labour shortage solutions – new robotics, digitization, automation and AI applications
- Processing technologies to address quality, energy, productivity

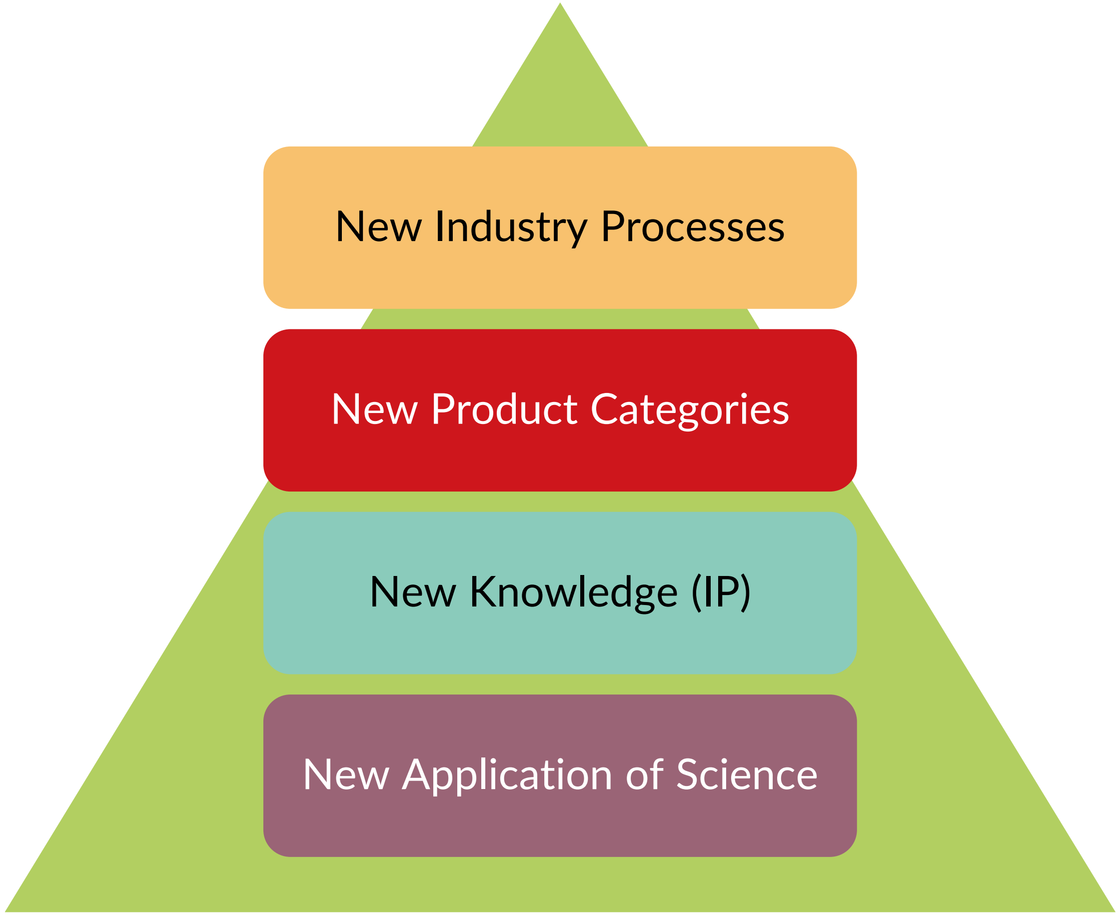
Food Ecosystem Sustainability

- Food waste reduction
- Higher value recovery
- Circularity and upcycling
- Green and smart packaging
- More efficient use of inputs including energy, water and carbon

Agile And Safe Supply Chains

- Logistics and supply chain;
- Consumer and customer analytics
- Food safety
- Food security
- IoT and digital application to food chains
- Blockchain and traceability

What is food innovation to CFIN?



Applicants must propose to demonstrate new industry processes, new product categories, new knowledge, or a new application of science. Food product development initiatives, such as the development or iteration of a new brand or product formulation in an existing category (example, a new protein bar) are not eligible under our programs.

How much funding is available?

- CFIN funds projects at up to 50% as a grant contribution, to a maximum of $250,000 for an Innovation Booster project.
- Total eligible project costs should be between $100,000 and $500,000.
- Funding will be provided on a reimbursement basis; applicants must bridge project costs; no advances will be provided.
- If your application is successful, CFIN will require a non-refundable project management fee of 5% of total project costs eligible for CFIN funding.
- We fund 5-8 Foodtech Next projects per intake.

Eligible Projects

To apply, you must be a CFIN member. You can join CFIN for free at www.cfin-rcia.ca

Access to our application portal will be provided within 24 hours of becoming a member.

Eligible Projects must:

- Submitted by Canadian incorporated businesses with less than $1M in annual sales in their most recently completed fiscal year.
- Seeking to demonstrate innovations between a technology readiness level of 4 to 7, with ideal projects ending in a system prototype demonstration in an operational environment (TRL of 7).
- Projects must be completed within 18 months - no later than **December 31, 2026**.
- **New this year, all Foodtech Next funding applicants must demonstrate that they have an Intellectual Property strategy in place or in development.** Applicants who have not yet started on their IP strategy will be required to outline budget line items for these costs or prove their involvement with intellectual property resources such as Elevate IP, Intellectual Property Ontario, or a law firm to receive CFIN funding.

What kinds of things will CFIN fund?

Foodtech Next is focused on late-stage development and demonstration projects.

This means that all projects must involve research and development at Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) 4 to 7. Projects including TRL 8 and 9 components will only be considered if they are part of a project that also includes a TRL 1 to 7.

Technology Readiness Levels

Foodtech Next is focused on demonstration and piloting – we will consider TRLs 4-7 – with preference for projects that get as close to commercialization as possible at the end of the project.

Eligible Costs for Reimbursement

Direct Labour

- Gross wages or salaries of direct technical labour on the project.
- Wages paid to majority shareholders are not eligible.

Subcontractors and Consultants

- Carrying out technical work on the project. Ex: testing partner, University or College
- Invoices must show scope of work.

Materials

- Items that can be identified as being associated with project.
- High-volume, low-cost items fall under our indirect cost policy.

Equipment

- Must be required for project activities - cannot just be to increase output.
- Rental of equipment is eligible.

Other Direct Costs

- Ex: Shipping expenses, Software directly required for project, Travel (subject to CFIN's travel policy, must be directly related to R&D activities).

Indirect Cost Coverage

CFIN will automatically apply a 55% overhead (indirect cost) rate to any labour in your budget, to a maximum of 15% of your Total Costs.

This is to cover the often unseen or difficult to account for expenses related to your project, such as:

- General and administrative labour, project management, finance staff, vacation, benefits, etc.
- High volume materials and supplies such as pipettes, rubber gloves, hairnets, filaments for 3D printers, packaging, buckets, forklifts, ladders, handtools such as drills, etc.
- Facility leases or rentals, taxes, HVAC, lighting, hydro, etc.
- Indirect equipment such as laptops, general software, office furniture, maintenance and repair of equipment.
- Transportation costs such as daily commutes and travel insurance.

Do not build these costs into your budget, they will be deemed ineligible. The program guide has a full overview of the Indirect Costs in Appendix C.

Ineligible Costs

Things we will not pay for:

- Sales and marketing activities – including consultants, salaries of staff on these teams, travel to trade shows or conferences, new websites or sales materials, commercialization plan development, etc.
- Security or safety certifications and consultants, including but not limited to TSSA certifications, food safety consultants.
- Alcohol, tips, or unreasonable travel expenses.
- The cost of a consultant to prepare your application or your claims.
- Anything not outlined in your original project budget, without prior consideration and approval by CFIN.

What about stacking?

Yes, stacking up to 75% of eligible project costs is allowed. However, applicants must outline what other government support programs they are leveraging for their project.

Applicants seeking to stack are encouraged to contact CFIN to discuss.

Intellectual Property

It is the expectation of CFIN that you will be creating new intellectual property because of your innovation project and that you will be protecting it – either as a trade secret, industrial design, or a patent.

CFIN will support industry-led projects that will generate IP of potential benefit to Canada's food ecosystem. The Project proposal is a key document to be used by applicants to detail their intellectual property strategies for their outlined project.

Applicants who have not begun their IP protection or strategy work yet will be required to outline budget line items for these costs or prove their involvement with intellectual property resources such as Elevate IP, Intellectual Property Ontario, or a law firm to receive CFIN funding.

You can source support on YODL or through your Regional Innovation Director – there are many provincial and federal programs and tools to assist with intellectual property protection.

Application Process

The Foodtech Next program is highly competitive **two-phase application**. We accept applications online on our portal until the advertised date of closure for the intake, at midnight local time.

The application portal allows applicants to submit supplemental documents, such as letters of support, quotes or cost proposals, or other documentation they feel will add context to their submission.

As a requirement, we request 2 years financials (audited, review engagement, or notice to reader) to be submitted with your application. If you cannot meet this requirement, a term sheet, a bank statement, or other documentation demonstrating your financial position, and letter showing you have the balance of your request is the bare minimum – we prefer to receive the financial statements.

Providing proof of financial capability does not guarantee approval of your application.

Application Questions – Expression of Interest

- Applicants will provide a Project Overview with title, description, start and end date.
- A profile of the business including financial information is required.
- Please outline and identify any major service providers or project partners.

<u>Application Questions:</u>

- What is the product-market fit for your solution for customers in the food sector (processing, distribution, foodservice or grocery retail)?
- Describe your pilot-readiness; outline any pre-pilot activities required, as well as the scope and focus of your desired pilot. If successful, how does this pilot fit within your commercialization and growth plans?
- Please describe your target pilot partner - including their sector, size, and any other qualifying details. If you have a partner identified, please detail the current state of your relationship with them.

All applicants will be required to attach a pitch deck to their submission which will be scored.

Pitch Deck - EOI

Pitch decks should be no more than 10 slides, and address the following 6 areas:

Articulation of the Problem and Solution	Milestones to Date and Team Capacity	Competitive Landscape
Market Opportunity	Innovative Aspects of the Solution	Overview of Budget

Assessment Criteria - EOI

- Use this while preparing your answers.
- Once the intake is closed, all projects are reviewed for completion and compliant submissions are scored by a panel of at least three reviewers.
- Our reviewers must declare conflicts of interest and are bound by confidentiality agreements.
- The top scoring submissions are selected to move to the next phase.

Assessment Criteria	Scoring
Firm Profile – Has the applicant provided an overview of their business, demonstrating infrastructure and financial capacity appropriate for undertaking the project.	10
Elevator Pitch – Does the applicant's elevator pitch address their target market's need, explain the solution, and compel the listener to action?	5
Product-Market Fit – The solution addresses a pain point or opportunity felt by food and beverage manufacturers, foodservice or restaurant operators, distributors or grocery retailers. The applicant demonstrates a clear understanding of sector needs and outlines a solution that directly impacts the opportunity or challenge.	15
Pilot Readiness – The applicant is already near-ready for a pilot (within TRL 4-6) and has clearly identified the structure and impact of the pilot activities on their commercialization plan.	15
Target Partner – The applicant has clearly identified the demographics of their target customer and how their involvement aligns with their pilot goals.	10
Pitch Deck Scoring	**45 points**
Articulation of the Problem and the Solution – Responses are consistent with the written responses and outline the problem and proposed solution clearly.	5
Milestones to-date and Team Capacity – The team and their skills are identified and align with the project requirements. Traction to date demonstrates the applicant is pilot ready.	5
Competitive Landscape – The applicant outlines their business's position in the market and its unique value proposition. Competitors, their strengths, and how the solution compares are highlighted.	10
Market Opportunity – The applicant demonstrates they have researched the market, identified their ideal customer, and are leveraging third party data to validate the opportunity.	5
Innovative Aspects of the Solution – Clear articulation of IP whitespaces, robust IP strategy is outlined, current and future IP holdings and their nature are detailed.	10
Budget Overview – A clear rationale for the need for funding and the activities it will be used for has been made.	10
Total Score	**100**

Application Questions – Full Application

The full proposal will include:

- Completed application template;
- Completed budget and workplan template; and
- Attachments that support the proposal.
- A video pitch of 5 minutes providing an overview of the solution, opportunity and project.

Application Questions:

- Relationship with partners: What is the current state of your relationship with your pilot partners?
- Team and Resources: Detail your resource plan to complete this project.
- Innovation and Scalability: Describe the innovative aspects of the technology and how it has potential to scale and meaningfully respond to food sector challenges.
- Product-Market Fit: Provide evidence that this is a problem that exists within the food sector, and that it's an important problem for your customers.
- Intellectual Property: Detail your intellectual property strategy and your work to date in this area.
- Next Steps: What are the next steps for your firm if this project is successful?

Video Pitch

As part of the final selection, Foodtech Next finalists will be required to prepare a 5-minute video pitch presentation about their project. The video will be presented to the application reviewers and the CFIN Innovation Advisory Council, for review as part of their decision-making process.

Foodtech Next Assessment Criteria	Scoring
Relationship with Partners – Applicant has detailed partner names and outlined the stage or readiness of those partners. Partner requirements for the pilot are identified, as are any financial costs or contributions (including in-kind).	15
Team and Resources – Applicant has outlined key project infrastructure, including outsourced partners. The infrastructure aligns with the proposed workplan, and for any gaps or major risks, a clear mitigation strategy has been provided.	20
Innovation and Scalability – Applicant has identified the novel aspects of their solution, the core technologies or innovations behind their solution, and identified their go to market strategy and revenue model.	20
Product-Market Fit – Applicant has clearly identified the persona, problem, promise and product fit for their target market. Competing or existing solutions are named and differentiated from the proposed innovation. The response references early customers, industry reports, surveys or other materials. Letters of support are encouraged and should clearly articulate product-market fit.	20
Intellectual Property – Applicants outline a clear strategy and identify IP to be created because of the project. Consideration of how to handle IP among partners is outlined and reasonable. Actions or a plan to action are clearly identified for managing intellectual property arising from this project.	10
Next Steps for the Firm – Applicant has identified next steps towards commercialization, such as additional investment raises, pilots, and intellectual property protection. Benefits to the firm have been quantified, such as new employment, revenues, export sales, etc.	10
Workplan and Budget – The workplan contains at least 5 activities and presents a reasonable approach that aligns with the project details provided within the application. The budget is detailed and supported by quotes if available. Internal labour resources are clearly technical contributors and have job title and the number of hours assigned to the project. A scope of work for vendors is highlighted, with names if available.	5
Total Score	**100**

How to use our Platform - Demo

Applications are submitted on CFIN's Application Portal:
https://cfin-rcia.smartsimple.ca/

Eligibility pre-screening questions are included in the online Application Portal to ensure projects meet the basic eligibility requirements.

Refer to the program guide for guidance on completing each section of the application.

Regional Innovation Directors Optimize Member Outcomes

In a world increasingly dominated by algorithms and apps, **humanity and creativity are also required** to make the most of the foodtech revolution.

Food Scientist	Economist	Community Builder	Business Development	New Venture Creator
				
 **Lavina Gully** Regional Innovation Director (British Columbia)	 **Hubba Khatoon** Regional Innovation Director (Prairies)	 **Marsha Druker** Regional Innovation Director (Ontario)	 **Julie Daigle** Regional Innovation Director (Quebec)	 **Tyson MacInnis** Regional Innovation Director (Atlantic)

Our **Regional Innovation Directors (RIDs)** optimize the CFIN experience because they are **credible, insightful, strategic, and connected** nationally and within their markets. These problem solvers work together to unpuzzle innovation problems and convert our diverse members into collaborators.

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THANK YOU

Contact innovation@cfin-rcia.ca to be put in touch with us to discuss your project!