CANADIAN FOOD INNOVATION NETWORK

INNOVATION BOOSTER
2025-2026 PROGRAM CYCLE

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VP Programs
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.

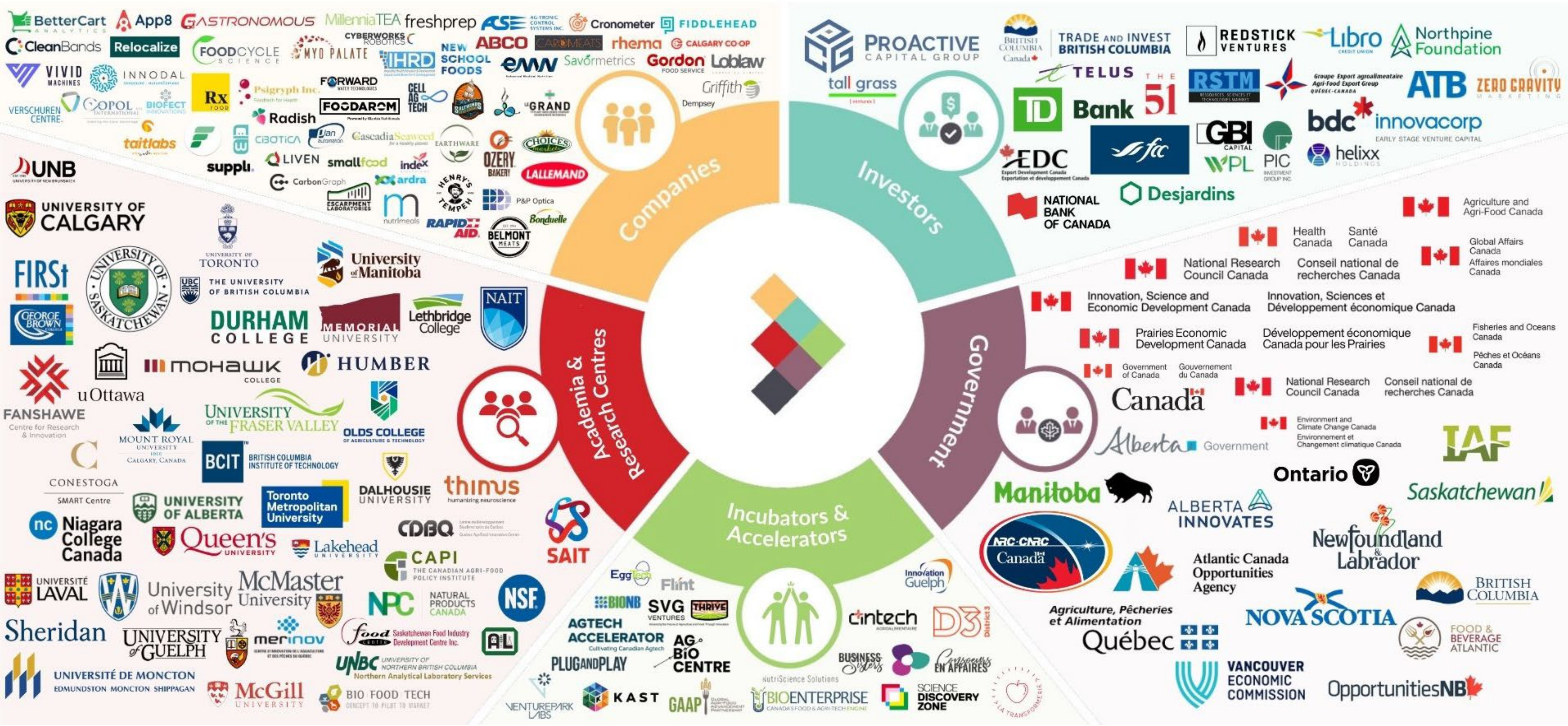
Three Things you need to know about CFIN

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.

Innovation Booster Program

- Flexible and rapid support for SMEs as they address technical hurdles in their business.
- Up to $100K support for a max 1-year research, development, or 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

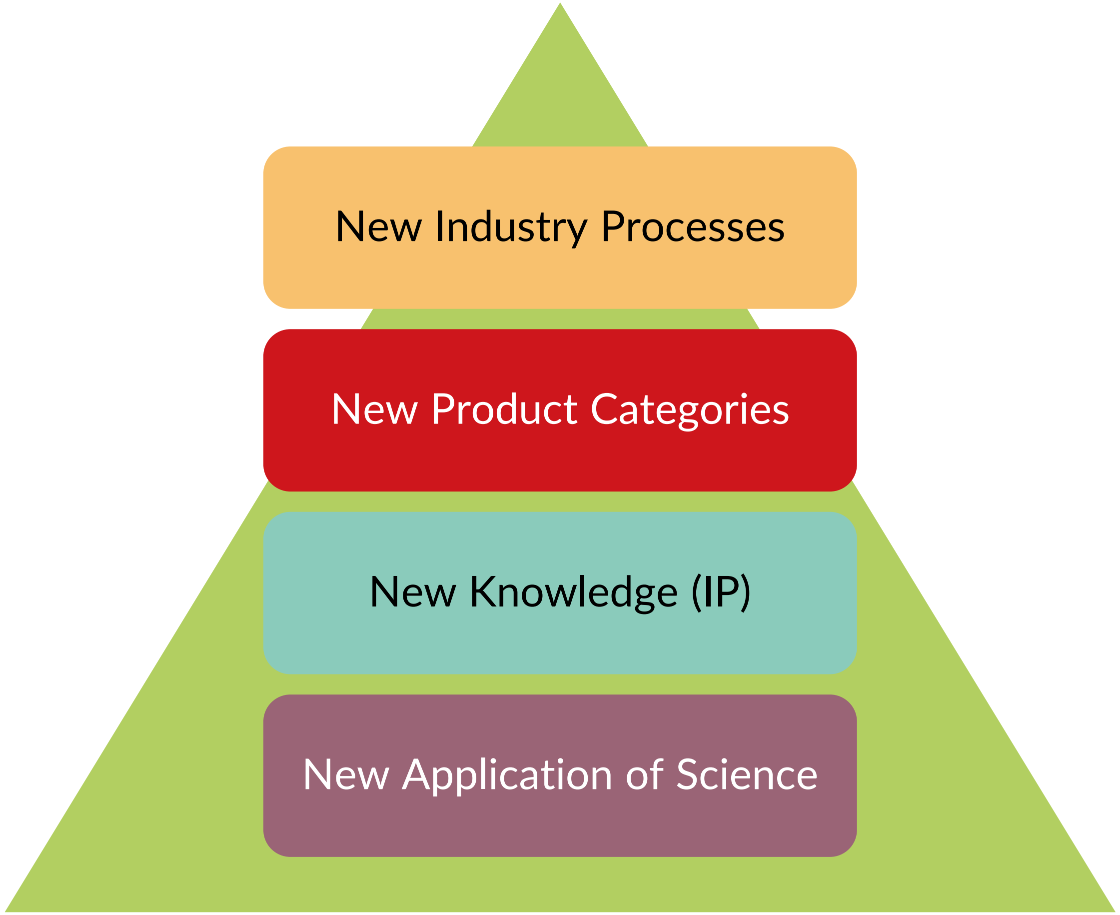
Food Ecosystem Sustainability

- 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 $100,000 for an Innovation Booster project.
- Total eligible project costs should be between $20,000 and $200,000.
- 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 10-12 Booster projects annually.

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:

- Identify a specific technical hurdle with a clear methodology;
- Identify a defined goal or outcome that has commercial application;
- Conduct research and development at Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) 1 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 (see 4.3 Technology Readiness Level Eligibility Requirements for further information); and,
- Projects must be completed within 12 months, and no later than **December 31, 2026**.

What kinds of things will CFIN fund?

CFIN funds research, development, and demonstration projects.

This means that all projects must involve research and development at Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) 1 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

CFIN funds R&D at TRLs 3-7 – 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 Innovation Booster program is highly competitive single-phase application. We accept applications online on our portal until the advertised date of closure for the intake, at midnight local time.

https://cfin-rcia.smartsimple.ca/

The application portal allows applicants to submit supplemental documents, such as pitch decks, 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

- 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>
Q1. Please provide an overview of your business, revenue model, and value proposition.
Q2. Please describe your current financial position, and your ability to finance the project activities.
Q3. Provide the background and rationale for completing the project.
Q4. Outline the project objectives and outcomes.
Q5. Describe the project design and methodology.
Q6. Describe the innovative and/or transformational aspects of the project.
Q7. Describe the project alignment with CFIN's innovation priorities.
Q8. Outline the direct benefits to your business as well as the larger indirect benefits to the food sector generally.

Complete the Budget, Forecast, Sources of Funds, and Workplan.
Upload Supporting Documents and Financials.

Assessment Criteria

- 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 for funding based on the available funds for that intake.

Innovation Booster Assessment Criteria	Scoring
Has the applicant provided an overview of their business, and is the Firm's model and value proposition outlined and well communicated?	5
Has the applicant clearly outlined their financial capability to undertake the project?	5
Background and the rationale for completing the project, including a description of the specific innovation or technical hurdle that the applicant is encountering.	10
Objectives of the proposed research, development and demonstration activities are clearly articulated.	5
Design and methodology to be deployed by the applicant to achieve the project objectives, including key activities, expenditures, resources, and timeline. Major technical hurdles should be identified.	15
Innovative aspects of the project: the applicant outlines their innovation's position in the market and its unique value proposition. Competitors, their strengths, and how the solution compares are highlighted., An outline of any IP to be created and how it will be protected is provided.	20
CFIN Priorities: the applicant demonstrates a clear understanding of sector needs and outlines a solution that directly impacts an opportunity or challenge experienced by CFIN members.	10
Direct benefits to the applicant firm, such as new jobs, revenues, IP, partnerships, customers, etc. are identified and quantified.	5
Benefits to the wider food sector are identified, quantified, and credible.	10
Detailed project work plan with appropriate activities, milestones, timelines for the project that has been outlined throughout the submission.	10
Comprehensive budget with detailed line items that are demonstrated as required for the proposed project activities and align with CFIN eligible cost policy	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 Appendix D 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

Lavina Gully
Regional Innovation Director (British Columbia)

Economist

Hubba Khatoon
Regional Innovation Director (Prairies)

Community Builder

Marsha Druker
Regional Innovation Director (Ontario)

Business Development

Julie Daigle
Regional Innovation Director (Quebec)

New Venture Creator

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!