

Interdisciplinary Think Tank Award Program

The Rotman Institute of Philosophy invites Rotman faculty members (core and associate) to submit innovative proposals to the Rotman Think Tank Award Program. The main goal of this program is to support interdisciplinary collaborations that pursue grand research challenges aligned with the Institute's strategic priorities.

Think Tank projects will aim to address grand research challenges by advancing thematic research activities, fostering interdisciplinary collaborations, and engaging experts from different sectors to develop research projects that produce knowledge, drive solutions, and lead to strategic outcomes and major grant applications with greater research impact.

The Rotman Institute has identified four key areas of research focus that reflect its strength and future direction:

1. **Knowledge in the 21st Century**
2. **Societal Impact of Emerging Technologies**
3. **Issues in Public Health**
4. **Foundational Questions in Physics and the Human Brain Sciences**

Applications are *not required* to align with these areas, but applicants are encouraged to explicitly demonstrate how their proposed project connects to one or more of these strategic priorities.

Funding Details:

- **Total Available Funds:** Up to \$80,000 for the current year.
- **Award Size:** Between \$2,000 and \$20,000.
- **Funding Period:** 1 year.

In addition to cash support, successful teams will receive in-kind facilitation support from Rotman Institute staff along with services available through Western Research.

Proposals will undergo a formal peer review process facilitated by the Rotman Research Advisory Committee (RAC). The proposal should convince the review panel that the funds requested will help establish an effective interdisciplinary research team dedicated to making advances on grand research challenge with high impact potential.

2026 Competition Dates

Expression of Interest	Friday, February 13, 2026
Application Deadline	Friday, March 6, 2026 at 5:00pm
Funding Period	May 1, 2026 to April 30, 2027
Research Showcase Talk	Fall 2026
Final Report	April 30, 2027
External Funding Application	By April 30, 2028

Eligibility & Program Requirements

PI – The Principal Investigator (PI) must be a Rotman faculty member that holds an academic appointment and is eligible to hold a Western Research account. They will be responsible for administrative aspects of the award such as correspondence, finances, ethics approvals, etc. If you are interested in becoming a Rotman member, please visit our website to learn more [<https://www.rotman.uwo.ca/research/faculty-membership/>]. PIs can apply for only one award in each competition and hold only one award at any given time. They may be listed as a co-applicant on other applications.

Think Tank Team – Teams must include two or more faculty members from distinct disciplines. Applicants are strongly encouraged to include additional Rotman members (core, associate, and trainees) and non-Rotman members (on or off campus experts and relevant stakeholders) to broaden interdisciplinary perspectives and contributions – at the application stage or as part of the proposed work. Applicants are strongly encouraged to consider equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization and the involvement of early career investigators (within 10 years of their faculty appointment). New collaborations are welcomed, but not required. All listed applicants must have contributed to the conception/design of the proposed project; assisted in writing the proposal, approved the final submission, and agreed to share responsibility and be accountable for the proposed work. Trainees must obtain permission from their supervisor(s) to participate in the think tank (Note: trainees would normally not be listed as applicants unless they meet the applicant criteria.) For more information of how to build authentic research partnerships please visit [RECAP - Western Research - Western University \(uwo.ca\)](#)

Trainee Support – All proposals are required to dedicate at least 50% of the proposed budget to supporting graduate students and/or post-doctoral trainees (e.g., GSA, RA) with a designation of a Rotman Interdisciplinary Research Training Award.

External Funding Application – Proposed work is expected to lead to external funding applications within one year of its end date. Award recipients who fail to fulfill this program requirements may lose eligibility for future funding through the Rotman Institute for a period of five years.

Funding Acknowledgement – All outputs must include acknowledgment of support such as – “This work/study was/is supported/funded by an Interdisciplinary Think Tank Award from the Rotman Institute of Philosophy at Western University”.

Expression of Interest

If you are interested in submitting an application, please reach out to Paul Arnold (Research Officer, parnold6@uwo.ca) by February 13th, 2026. Whether you have a fully formed team or just an initial idea, Paul can assist with the application process and help identify potential collaborators or team members.

Application Process

Proposal must be completed and submitted in the [online portal](#). Proposal sections include:

Section A - Proposal & Team Overview – *completed in the online form* (See Appendix A for a worksheet to help you gather the information needed prior to completing the online form.)

- Project Title – *maximum 75 characters including spaces*
- Lay Proposal Summary – *maximum 1500 characters including spaces*
- Alignment to Rotman Research Domains
- Team Details (Name, Faculty, ORCID ID, Career Status)
- Proposed Budget Table

Section B - Project Description – *uploaded in the online form as a PDF*. Formatting requirements: 12-point font, single spaced, with 1-inch margins. **Maximum 2 pages.**

- **Background & Overview:** *Outline the grand research challenge being addressed and the target audience (What is the problem? Who/what is impacted?). Briefly describe the purpose of the proposed work and how it will be accomplished. Include expected outcomes, possible barriers & risk management strategies.*
- **Originality:** *Describe the innovative aspect of the proposed work. How does it differ from other work happening in this area? (What is it? What does it do? How will it work?).*
- **Team Description:** *Outline the interdisciplinary nature of the team, the expertise and role of each team member, and how the project will be managed (i.e., designated responsibilities).*
- **Training Opportunities:** *Describe how graduate students and/or post-doctoral trainees will be provided opportunities to engage in the proposed work. What specific knowledge and/or skills will trainees be expected to develop via your Think Tank project?*
- **Strategic Alignment & Potential Impact:** *Statement regarding how the proposed work will contribute to the vision and mission of the Institute. Explain the relevance and potential value of the proposed work (Why is it important? How will the work contribute to advancing knowledge and the uptake solutions related to the grand challenge of interest?)*
- **Leveraging External Support:** *Explain how proposed work and outcomes will enable the team to seek external research funding to continue to advance progress related to the grand challenge.*

Section C - Budget Justification – *uploaded in the online form as a PDF*. Formatting requirements: 12-point font, single spaced, with 1-inch margins. **Maximum 1 page.**

- Provide a description and justification for all major expenditures, including salaries for research staff or trainees, and requested equipment (if any).

Section D - Optional Appendices – *uploaded in the online form as a PDF*.

- References
- Additional team details such as team member bios or letters of support

***** Incomplete applications will NOT be forwarded to the committee for review. *****

Evaluation Criteria

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION
Novelty & Impact Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informative description of the relevance and potential reach of the work • Clear statement of objectives and how the proposed work is unique
Strategic Alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong alignment with Rotman’s strategic priorities
Project Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational and leadership structure well defined to support engagement and implementation of the proposed work • Feasible timeline and workflow
Research Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed plan for the development of an effective interdisciplinary team • Appropriate team composition to execute the proposed work • Expected roles and contributions are well defined
Training Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feasible and well-defined approach to engaging graduate students and postdoc trainees in the work
Potential for Leveraging Funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear plan to work toward successful submission for external funding

Reporting Requirements

To support the institute’s commitment to ensuring the social relevance of our work, and to breaking down barriers that prevent communication between different perspectives, between disciplines, or within society at large, each successful PI or designated team member is required to: 1) take part in the Rotman Research Showcase event and 2) provide a one-page final report to be included in the Rotman Annual Report. Other reporting requests may be forwarded as opportunities come forward.

Research Showcase Talk – Every Fall, Rotman hosts a research showcase event to highlight the different research projects and activities at the Institute. Think Tank project teams will be expected to introduce their research project, provide a research progress update, and outline plans for future directions and potential collaborations. *Date: TBD, Fall 2026*

Final Report – A one-page final report detailing project accomplishments and outcomes will be requested by Rotman at the end of the funding period. A template will be provided. Project updates beyond the final report may be requested from time to time for Rotman Annual Reporting. *Date: By April 30th, 2027*

End-of-Grant Lunchtime Talk (Optional) – Award winners may choose to do an end-of-grant presentation to update members on progress and impact of the project, knowledge translation plans, leveraging opportunities, and/or future research directions.

Miscellaneous Considerations

Ethics Approvals: Humans Animals & Biohazards – All proposals involving research ethics: human subjects, animal subjects, or biohazardous materials must be approved by the appropriate Western certification review committee. If awarded, funds will be encumbered until appropriate approvals are confirmed.

Accounts and Expenses – Each award will be set up as an “unrestricted research account” through Western Research expected to be accessible at the beginning of the funding period. Applicants are expected to expend the funds in the manner proposed in the original request within 12 months. Unspent funds will

be returned to the institute at the end of the funding period. However, an extension may be granted at the discretion of the Research Advisory Committee under special circumstances.

Eligible expenses: salaries for employees, services, and publication expenses.

Ineligible expenses: indirect costs, travel, conference registration, or general computing equipment/software. Equipment (including software), which costs no more than 20% of the total budget and which is essential to carry out the proposed project may be requested. The budget justification must include a brief description of the duties of the personnel requested and the required qualifications, and a brief explanation as to why the position is necessary for the project.

Previously Funded Projects – The Rotman Institute has been able to fund a wide range of projects that align with the Institute’s strategic priorities. Here is a listed of recently awarded Think Tank Projects:

- “AI in Education”
- “Satellite Constellations”
- “Historical Biography and Bibliography at Scale”
- “Evidence-Based Medicine as a Model for AI in Practice”
- “Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Cognitive Security and Insecurity”
- “Ecological Psychology in Society”
- “Computational Epistemology”
- “The Extended Synthetic Biology Network: Actors and Values”
- “Cross-Discipline Dialogue on Weight Stigma, Obesity, and Eating Disorders”

Appendix A - Proposal & Team Overview

The proposal and team overview section must be completed in the [online portal](#).

This worksheet is provided to help you gather information needed to complete the online form. Refer to the program guidelines for details about sections to be uploaded as PDFs in the online form.

Questions can be directed to rotman.institute@uwo.ca.

Project Title (75 characters including spaces):

Lay Proposal Summary - In terms that can be understood by a lay person (e.g. plain language used for news stories), please summarize your proposal (maximum 1500 characters including spaces):

Alignment with the Rotman Strategic Priorities
(mark all that apply)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Knowledge in the 21 st Century	<input type="checkbox"/>	Issues in Public Health
<input type="checkbox"/>	Societal Impact of Emerging Technologies	<input type="checkbox"/>	Foundational Questions in Physics and the Human Brain Sciences

PI (*MUST be a Rotman faculty member eligible to hold a Western Research account*)

Last Name:		First Name:	
Home Faculty:		ORCID ID:	

Institute Member:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Career Status:	<input type="checkbox"/> Investigator <input type="checkbox"/> Early Career Investigator <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify): _____
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Team Members*					
First Name:	Last Name:	Home Faculty (if applicable):	Career Status:	Institute Member:	ORCID ID (if available):
			<input type="checkbox"/> Investigator <input type="checkbox"/> Early Career Investigator <input type="checkbox"/> Trainee <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
			<input type="checkbox"/> Investigator <input type="checkbox"/> Early Career Investigator <input type="checkbox"/> Trainee <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
			<input type="checkbox"/> Investigator <input type="checkbox"/> Early Career Investigator <input type="checkbox"/> Trainee <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	

(* Add rows as needed. **Do not list trainees here unless they meet all the criteria for applicant status. Add additional rows as needed.)

Proposed Budget Table	Total Cost
Salaries	
Supplies	
Services	
Equipment	
Publication expenses	
Other	
TOTAL	