Developing a SSHRC Connection Grant Budget: Tips, Ineligibles, and Red Flags

The budget of the SSHRC Connection Grant (CG) application requires the following:
- Completing forms "Funds Requested from SSHRC" and "Funds from Other Sources"
- Providing a 2 paged attachment of the Budget Justification
- Including Letters of Support from Sponsoring Organizations for matching contributions

Key Tip: Applicants are required to demonstrate a minimum of 50% confirmed matching contributions, which can be in the form of cash, in-kind, or a combination of both. Applicants may demonstrate more than 50% matching contributions if they require funds beyond the maximum amount that SSHRC can provide.

Request for SSHRC Funds should be a minimum of $7000 and a maximum for the following:
- Events: $25,000
- Outreach: $50,000 or higher if well justified
  - Developing connection-related tools: $50,000 (see here for more information)

Ineligible Funding Requests: What to Avoid
- Expenses directly related to an association's annual general or business meetings and meeting activities
- Expenses for the primary purpose of an association's book launches or similar report dissemination
- Expenses for receptions for association members
- Per diems for non project team members
- Expenses for any activities normally paid for by the association's operating fees
- Remuneration of team members (applicants, co-applicants, collaborators) regardless of their ability to apply and hold Tri-agency grants, including postdoctoral fellows and non-academic partners serving in any of these capacities with the exception of travel and subsistence costs
- Remuneration such as gifts, honoraria, or incentives for anyone, including Indigenous scholars and academic artists, who is eligible to apply and hold Tri-agency grants with the exception of travel costs
- Expenses for research activities
- Expenses for the primary purpose of the project team to attend a conference
- Expenses to pay for conference registration fees
- Expenses to hire a contractor or consultant who is also a sponsoring organization on the same project
- Requesting SSHRC funds beyond the maximum amount stated above with the exception of outreach activities if well justified
- Expenses for the primary purpose of digitizing collections or archives
- Expenses for the ongoing operating expenses for a tool
- Expenses for research infrastructure eligible for CFI funding, such as construction, renovation, rental, or development of facilities, laboratories and/or buildings
- Expenses for platforms related to scholarly journals and journals themselves
- Expenses unrelated to the project activities
- Expenses for activities prior to the start date or beyond the end date of the grant
- Other Tri-Agency funds may be used as long as there is no duplication. They just cannot be counted as matching funds.

Key Tip: Ensure that all eligible requests fall within the relevant grant timeline. Matching contributions may be for expenses prior to the notice of award but letters of support should state that the contributions are for this project.

Competition	Notice of Award/Start Date	End Date (1 year from Notice of Award)
May	July	June
August	October	September
November	January	December
February	April	March

Red Flags: Possible Risk of Budget Cuts or Unfunded Applications

Personnel Costs
- Discrepancy in budget details (e.g. Mismatch of the number of students listed in the different sections of the application)
- Insufficient or excessive funds allocated for research assistant/student positions without sufficient justification for the $ amount (e.g. information about the level of study of the students and the length of time (i.e. hours and/or months) they are working for, what hiring rates are they based on are missing)
- Too many students without clearly defined duties or tasks within the Training and Mentoring section (e.g. a PhD student and a Master's student doing the same task)
- Unpaid labour by students: Students' assigned tasks and described in the Training and Mentoring section but not included as budget items.
- Postdocs included without explaining why Masters or PhD students cannot complete the proposed tasks for the postdoc.
- Consultant, contractor, and/or artist fees costs: Insufficient details about the number of people hired, the professional, technical, or artistic services provided, no justification about what the hiring rates are based on, and/or unclear information about the sources of funding to cover the costs.

Key Tip: Check out U of A's Guidelines and Rates for Hiring Students and Postdocs. Please note that these are minimum rates and it is strongly encouraged to contact your relevant department/faculty HR or Finance Partners to obtain the latest rates. If you are hiring personnel from other institutions, please refer to their collective agreements.

Travel and Subsistence Costs
- Lack of clarity in the number of days of travel, who is travelling, and/or the destinations.
- Insufficient information in the number of nights needed for accommodations
- Providing quotes for airfares and hotel bookings that are inappropriate (e.g. quotes for business class airfares) or without justification
- Per diem quotes lack justification or are not based on institutional rates
- Funds required for ground transportation or vehicle rental is unclear or not included

Key Tip: Obtain and provide quotes U of A's Preferred Travel and Accommodation Suppliers. Refer to Travel Processes & Expense Procedure Appendix A: Schedule of Allowable Travel Expenses for U of A's per diem rates and other travel cost guidelines.

Other Expenses
- Hospitality: Not providing sufficient information about the number of attendees or justification for quotes. (For events held at the U of A, check out Conference Services' catering options and see also U of A's policy on Hospitality).

- Honoraria, Gifts, Incentives: Unclear source of funding and/or quotes lack justification or not based on institutional rates (see SSHRC's definitions of what counts for [Gifts, Honoraria, and Incentives](#), U of A's policies for [Honoraria (Indigenous or otherwise)](#), and U of A's [Gift Expenditure Procedure](#)
- Professional/Technical Services: E.g. Providing quotes for transcribers without justification or explaining why digital recording software is not appropriate or the use of students instead.
- Non-Disposable Equipment: Lack of or insufficient justification for equipment costs (e.g. failing to mention that equipment is unavailable for free through the university, not sharing equipment amongst students, or not mentioning specifications of equipment needed). (See also U of A's [Preferred Suppliers](#) for quotes)
- Software: No explanation as to whether there are free alternatives or absence of justification for costs (Refer to U of A's [On the Hub](#) for quotes)
- Open Access Fees not justified, such as no explanation for why you need to publish in journals without open access (U of A Library's Guides to [How to Publish Open Access](#) and [Article Processing Charge Support](#))

General Errors to Avoid
- Budgeted items not clearly justified
- Lack of clarity on whether an expense is covered by SSHRC, matching contributions, a combination of both, or covered by additional funds.
- Miscalculations between the budget and justification where totals are not matching.
- Expenses for activities are not accounted for
- Letters of Support: Missing information, contributions don't match with budget and justification and/or not in Canadian currency

Final Recommendations
- Ask for what you need (not more or less)
- Ensure that requests align with [Tri-Agency Guide to Financial Administration](#) (TAGFA)
- Ensure that matching contributions are eligible (see SSHRC's [Guidelines for Cash and In-Kind Contributions](#); see also examples of [in-kind](#) and [cash](#) contributions)
- Ensure that requests conform to the appropriate U of A rates and policies
- Ensure that all proposed expenses align with project objectives for the purpose(s) of knowledge mobilization, exchange, and/or networking
- JUSTIFY, JUSTIFY, JUSTIFY

Remember that committee members may recommend budget cuts if it is inadequately justified, inappropriate, or where savings can be achieved without jeopardizing the project objectives. Committees may consider failing a project on the Feasibility criterion if they determine 30% or more of the overall budget request is insufficiently justified and/or not appropriate to the proposed objectives or outcomes of the project.

Looking for feedback on your budget? Contact your CG Research Partner Ayantika Mukherjee: ayantika.mukherjee@ualberta.ca