

# MSSU Trainee Support Program Guide [2025-2026]



## Introduction

The Maritime SPOR SUPPORT Unit (MSSU) provides financial support to research trainees in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia to develop capacity for undertaking research that both meaningfully engages patients and addresses their priorities.

Patient-oriented health research is defined by CIHR as *a continuum of research that engages patients as partners, focuses on patient-identified priorities and improves patient outcomes. This research, conducted by multidisciplinary teams in partnership with relevant stakeholders, aims to apply the knowledge generated to improve healthcare systems and practice*<sup>1</sup>.

## Objective

The objective of the MSSU Trainee Support Program is to support and build capacity for Master's and PhD graduate trainees in the principles and practices of POR. The overarching goal of our program is to support research trainees to develop capacity for undertaking research that both meaningfully engages patients and addresses their priorities.

This Trainee Support is designed for trainees seeking to pursue health research training in any discipline, not just those traditionally related to health sciences. All human health themes are eligible, regardless of proposed methodology or models.

## Requirements

All trainees supported by this award must be supervised by a [MSSU Scientist](#) who has an academic appointment in the Maritimes.

All trainee applicants must complete the [CIHR-IMHA Patient Engagement Training](#) and include the Certificate of Complete with the application.

Other required members of the Research Team:

- Patient / Public Partner(s) engaged throughout the project as a Team Member<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/48413.html>

<sup>2</sup> Patient: An overarching term inclusive of individuals with personal experience of a health issue and informal caregivers, including family and friends. <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/48413.html>

- Health Care Knowledge User

Projects must:

- Be relevant to the mandate of the MSSU and show how the research activity undertaken is patient-oriented in nature and how POR is to be integrated throughout the research project
- Address a health research priority in the province in which the trainee attends university
- Show the impact / relevance to the population (in the Maritime province in which the trainee attends University), and
- Show how the trainee will measure outcomes that matter to patients / how that has been determined.

Awardees agree to:

- Take part in the MSSU Patient-Oriented Research Practicum
- Participate / present at any upcoming MSSU Summits or Events
- Participate in any other pertinent activities identified by MSSU during the term of the funding
- Submit a report at the end of funding term

(Support Recipients are required to submit a Final Report within 60 days of the project end date.)

## Review

Applications are reviewed by a Selection Committee composed of MSSU Scientists and Patient / Public Partners to ensure that they:

- Fit with the objective and requirements of the funding program, including the importance of the study to the establishment of applicant's research career in the Maritimes.

Applicants should avoid scientific jargon as their application may not be reviewed by experts in their discipline.

## MSSU Generative AI Position Statement

Applicants are required to disclose if and how generative AI was used in the preparation of their application. Disclosing use of generative AI will not negatively impact the review and scoring process. All submissions will be reviewed and scored according to the Assessment Criteria.

Applicants are responsible for ensuring that the information in their application is original work and that sources, including generative AI tools, are appropriately cited. Applicants should also be aware that using generative AI may affect writing quality and make it difficult to acknowledge information from other sources.

## Overview

<b>Award Types</b>	MSSU Trainee Support is offered at two levels of study: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Master's</li> <li>• Doctoral</li> </ul>
<b>Eligibility</b>	<p>To apply for MSSU Trainee Support, the applicant must meet the following criteria at the time of the application:</p> <p><u>Master's Level Award</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have applied to, been accepted in, or be enrolled in a full-time thesis-based Master's degree program under the supervision of a researcher who is an MSSU Scientist in a university, college, or institution (e.g., medical training programs, regional health authorities' hospitals) in New Brunswick or Nova Scotia.</li> </ul> <p><u>Doctoral Level Award</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have applied to, been accepted in, or be enrolled in a full-time thesis-based Doctoral degree program under the supervision of a researcher who is an MSSU Scientist in a university, college, or institution (e.g., medical training programs, regional health authorities' hospitals) New Brunswick or Nova Scotia.</li> </ul> <p><u>The applicant must also:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be engaged in research activities related to patient-oriented research.</li> <li>• Include a plan to engage Health Care Knowledge User in the project</li> <li>• Include a Patient Engagement Plan</li> <li>• Include a Knowledge Translation Plan</li> <li>• Describe consideration of Sex and Gender in Proposal</li> </ul> <p>As capacity building is a priority of MSSU, a maximum of two trainees will normally be funded per supervisor per year to assist as many research teams as possible and ensure a breadth of trainees. This program could fund candidates from one supervisor who are at different levels of training (i.e., one graduate trainee and one postdoctoral fellow).</p>
<b>Funding Amount and Duration</b>	Funding is non-renewable and issued to recipients in the following amounts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Master's Level – \$10,000 for 1 year</li> <li>• Doctorate Level – \$10,000 for 1 year</li> </ul>

<b>Funding Caps</b>	<p>A trainee’s total funding from all funding sources may not exceed the annual cap established by their institution: <b>It is the responsibility of the trainee to notify their institution of all funding received.</b></p> <p>An MSSU Trainee Support recipient who holds funding that exceeds the institutional funding cap, will be named an Honorary MSSU recipient (i.e. no funding will be issued). Recipients of MSSU Trainee Support will have access to complimentary training opportunities offered to funded trainees.</p>
<b>Dates and Deadlines</b>	<p><b>Application Available:</b> January 27, 2025</p> <p><b>Application Deadline:</b> March 21, 2025, 2:00pm AT</p> <p><b>Results Available:</b> June 2025</p> <p><b>Funds Available:</b> September 2025</p>

**Application Process**

<b>Step 1: Confirm Eligibility</b>	<p>Consider whether you meet the eligibility criteria (outlined above). If applicants have any questions related to their eligibility, they are encouraged to contact their institution (see ‘Resources and Assistance’ section below).</p>
<b>Step 2: Review Application Requirements and Prepare All Supplementary Documents</b>	<p>You will need to prepare all necessary documents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CV (use form supplied on website)</li> <li>• Research Proposal Form (Application)</li> <li>• Self-Identification Form</li> <li>• CIHR-IMHA Patient Engagement Training Certificate of Completion</li> </ul> <p>Be sure to carefully review the detailed instructions in the Application Requirement section below. <b>CV that is incomplete or in a different format will be disqualified.</b></p>
<b>Step 3: Optional Letter of Support</b>	<p>Any letters of support from community organizations, institutions, or individuals the trainee intends to partner with to plan and/or conduct proposed engagement activities should be submitted to Sharon Skaling, MSSU Capacity Development Coordinator (<a href="mailto:Sharon.Skaling@nshealth.ca">Sharon.Skaling@nshealth.ca</a>) prior to the application deadline. Letters provided via the applicant will not be accepted.</p>
<b>Step 4: Complete and Submit Application Online</b>	<p>Visit the MSSU website to complete and submit the online Research Proposal Form and Self-Identification Form, and to upload your supplementary documents (CV, CIHR-IMHA Certificate of Completion).</p>

## Application Requirements

### Transcripts

Upon offer of an MSSU trainee support program funding, applicants may be required to submit official transcripts or to have copies validated by the institution to ensure authenticity.

### Research Proposal

Applicants must complete the [Research Proposal Form](#). Trainees (not supervisors) are expected to write the Project Description, which should be written in lay language that is understandable by a broad audience.

### CV

Applications must complete all sections of the [CV](#) with all fields completed. Any other format will be disqualified.

### Self-Identification Form

Applicants are requested to complete the [Self-Identification Form](#).

## Selection Process

1. Applications will be reviewed to determine whether they are complete and meet the eligibility criteria.
2. Complete and eligible applications will be reviewed by a Selection Committee of MSSU Scientists and Patient / Public Partners in accordance with the assessment criteria outlined below. Applications could be reviewed by committee members with various levels and areas of research expertise.
3. The Committee will submit to the MSSU a list of applicants recommended for funding and a list of alternates, if applicable.

Applicants will be notified of funding decisions and the process for award acceptance and payment for funding recipients will be implemented.

## Assessment Criteria

The following criteria will be used to assess MSSU Trainee Support applications:

Criterion	
<b>Part 1 a: 35%</b> <b>Project Description and Methodology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is the overall proposal clear and easy to follow?</li><li>• Do the proposed activities make sense?</li><li>• Is the overall concept unique/original? Does the application demonstrate creativity in its design and methods?</li></ul>

<p><b>Part 1b: 25%</b></p> <p><b>Integration of POR and PE Plans</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a clear, detailed description of how people will be engaged and compensated/appreciated?</li> <li>• Are the proposed engagement activities reasonable in terms of time, energy, travel, and commitment required of both the researchers and patient and public partners?</li> <li>• Do the proposed activities consider the values, needs and expectations of people being engaged.</li> <li>• Is there a match between the proposed approaches and the level of engagement</li> </ul>
<p><b>Part 2: 15%</b></p> <p><b>Impact / Relevance of the Issue</b></p> <p><b>Health Research Priority</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the application make a clear argument for alignment of the research topic, question(s) and/or priorities with that of patient population/community?</li> <li>• Does the application clearly describe a link to the provincial health system priorities?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Part 3: 10%</b></p> <p><b>Knowledge Translation Plan</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are KT goals clearly identified (e.g. raising awareness, inform/change policy, inform future research)?</li> <li>• Does the KT plan identify relevant audiences and demonstrate an understanding of their knowledge needs and preferences?</li> <li>• Are the KT strategies clearly defined, appropriate for audience(s), and feasible (e.g. timeline, budget/resources, expertise)?</li> <li>• Is there good alignment between the potential research findings, KT goals, and the target audiences?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Part 4: 10%</b></p> <p><b>Case for MSSU Funding</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interest in POR</li> <li>• Professional Goals</li> <li>• Plan to develop POR skills</li> </ul>
<p><b>Part 5: 5%</b></p> <p><b>Justification of consideration of sex and gender</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An explanation of how sex/gender will be accounted for in study methods and/or analyses within the research proposal.</li> <li>• An example of how sex/gender considerations are relevant or not relevant to the research proposal.</li> <li>• Your rationale for your inclusion/exclusion criteria with respect to sex, gender, and sexual orientation.</li> </ul> <p><a href="#">Sex and gender resources</a></p>

## Resources and Assistance

### Application Support

Applicants should contact the office of research and graduate studies in their institution **well in advance of the application deadline** with questions related to application content and eligibility.

### Health Research Priorities

The following are Health Research Priorities identified at the time of the Trainee Support Program:

Nova Scotia (Action for Health)

1. Research that contributes to recruitment and retention of healthcare professionals.
2. Research focused on access to people-centered, flexible, quality healthcare.
3. Research contributing to healthcare delivery excellence, including:
  - i) Opportunities for team-based care.
  - ii) The ability of healthcare providers to work to their full scope of practice.
  - iii) Innovative models to reduce wait times.
4. Research that addresses the factors affecting health and well-being of Nova Scotians, including emerging issues in population health and harm reduction.

New Brunswick (Research NB)

1. Primary Care
2. Mental Health
3. Aging
4. Health System
5. Surgical
6. Technology
7. Health Human Resources
8. Transportation
9. Rural Health

	Poor (0 - 20.9)	Fair (21 - 24.4)	Very Good (24.5 - 27.9)	Excellent (28 - 30.9)	Outstanding (31 - 35)
<b>Part 1a: Project Description and Methodology</b>	The application fails to provide convincing information and / or has serious inherent flaws or gaps	The application broadly addresses relevant aspects. Major revisions are needed.	The application excels in <i>some</i> relevant aspects, and reasonably addresses others. Some improvements are needed.	The application excels in many relevant aspects, and reasonably addresses others. Certain improvements are possible.	The application excels in most or all relevant aspects. Any shortcomings are minimal.
	Poor (0 - 14.9)	Fair (15 - 17.4)	Very Good (17.5 - 19.9)	Excellent (20 - 22.4)	Outstanding (22.5 - 25)
<b>Part 1b: Integration of POR and PE Plan Patient Engagement, Appreciation</b>	Patients are <b>informed</b> about the research project. Patients do not have a direct role in any decision-making.	Patients are <b>consulted</b> as team members who provide feedback about the project. Patients do not have a direct role in decision-making.	Patients are <b>involved</b> as team members. Patients consistently share ideas that are sometimes reflected in project decisions.	Patients <b>collaborate</b> as equal team members. Patients co-develop ideas that are incorporated into project decisions.	Patients are <b>empowered</b> as team members. Patients are considered primary decision-makers throughout the project.
	Poor (0 - 8.9)	Fair (9.0 - 10.04)	Very Good (10.5 - 11.9)	Excellent (12.0 - 13.4)	Outstanding (13.5 - 15)
<b>Part 2: Impact / Relevance of the issue being studied</b>	Proposed research topic, question(s) and/or priorities are of general interest to the researcher, but there is no evidence of alignment with provincial health system priorities, nor the relevance to the patient/public/community partners.	The proposed research topic, question(s) and/or priorities are selected based on existing evidence and/or best practice and appear to be of general importance. However, there is limited evidence of the relevance to the patient/public/community partners.	The application provides a general or broad description of how the proposed research aligns with local priorities but may not link to both population(s) affected and the province's health system.	The application provides a basic description of how the proposed research aligns with local priorities, speaking to both the population(s) most affected by the work and the province's health system.	The application provides a clear and detailed description of how the proposed research aligns with both priorities of the province's health system priority and the patient/public/community partners (including local organizations).
	Poor (0 - 5.9)	Fair (6.0 - 6.9)	Very Good (7.0 - 7.9)	Excellent (8.0 - 8.9)	Outstanding (9.0 - 10)
<b>Part 3: Knowledge translation plan</b>	Elements of the KT plan are missing or unclear (e.g. KT goals, audiences, strategies). There is poor alignment between elements of KT plan (e.g. KT strategies not appropriate for audiences). No knowledge user (KU) involvement in KT.	KT plan broadly describes elements, but lacks detail and/or demonstrates poor alignment. Difficult to judge feasibility. KUs may or may not be involved.	Some elements described well, and others reasonably addressed. Demonstrates some alignment. May not be feasible and/or feasibility may be difficult to judge. KUs may or may not be involved. Some improvements are needed.	KT plan well-described, identifying appropriate audiences and strategies, with Very Good alignment between elements. KUs are consulted and/or involved in KT. Appropriate to scope of project. Certain improvements possible.	KT plan is clearly articulated and feasible, with Very Good alignment between potential research findings, KT goals, audiences and strategies. KUs are involved and/or collaborate in KT. Describes available expertise/resources; clearly feasible within scope of project. Demonstrates creativity and/or considers contextual factors.
	Poor (0 - 5.9)	Fair (6.0 - 6.9)	Very Good (7.0 - 7.9)	Excellent (8.0 - 8.9)	Outstanding (9.0 - 10)
<b>Case for MSSU funding</b>	The applicant fails to provide convincing knowledge of POR.	The applicant's interest in, and understanding of, POR is generic and not personal.	The applicant expresses a Very Good knowledge of POR.	The applicant shows a strong understanding of POR and PE, and interest in developing skills in POR.	The applicant is well versed in POR and PE and expresses desire to continue research in POR.
	Poor (1)	Fair (2)	Very Good (3)	Excellent (4)	Outstanding (5)
	Applicant fails to demonstrate an understanding that sex is a biological attribute and gender is a social construct AND that biological and sociocultural factors have a mutual influence on the experience and expression of sex/gender.	Applicant shows an understanding that sex is a biological attribute, and that gender is a social construct, but does not discuss the relevance (or irrelevance) of sex/gender to the proposed research.	Applicant shows an understanding that sex is a biological attribute and that gender is a social construct.	Applicant shows an understanding that sex is a biological attribute and that gender is a social construct.	Applicant shows an understanding that sex is a biological attribute and that gender is a social construct.



<p><b>Sex/Gender Considerations</b></p>	<p>Applicant fails to mention whether sex/gender is relevant to the proposed research.</p>		<p>Sex/gender are noted as either relevant or not relevant to the research, without clear explanation or rationale.</p> <p>If sex/gender are noted as relevant, no further details are provided for how sex/gender will be accounted for in the study methods or analyses.</p>	<p>Applicant provides a Very Good explanation of why sex/gender are relevant OR not relevant to the current research.</p> <p>If relevant, the applicant provides some detail for how sex/gender will be accounted for in the study methods or analyses.</p>	<p>Applicant provides a nuanced explanation of how the biological attribute of sex and/or the social construct of gender overlap and relate to their research, or a thorough and convincing explanation of why sex/gender are not relevant. <b>For a score of 5, this information is integrated into the proposal itself.</b></p> <p>If relevant, the applicant clearly explains how sex/gender will be accounted for in study methods and/or analyses <b>within the proposal.</b></p>
<p><b>Sexual Orientation Considerations</b></p>	<p>Applicant fails to mention whether sexual orientation is relevant to the proposed research.</p>	<p>Applicant shows an understanding that sexual orientation is an individual difference variable but does not discuss its relevance (or irrelevance) to the proposed research.</p>	<p>Sexual orientation is noted as either relevant or not relevant to the research, without clear explanation or rationale.</p> <p>If sexual orientation is noted as relevant, no further details are provided for how sexual orientation will be accounted for in the study methods or analyses.</p>	<p>Applicant provides a Very Good explanation of why sexual orientation is relevant OR not relevant to the current research.</p> <p>If relevant, the applicant provides some detail for how sexual orientation will be accounted for in the study methods or analyses.</p>	<p>Applicant provides a nuanced explanation of how sexual orientation relates to their research, or a thorough and convincing explanation of why it is not relevant. For a score of 5, this information is integrated into the proposal itself.</p> <p>If relevant, the applicant clearly explains how sexual orientation will be accounted for in study methods and/or analyses within the proposal.</p>
<p><b>Eligibility and Inclusion / Exclusion Criteria</b></p>	<p>No mention of sample characteristics (if archival) or inclusion criteria (if proposing new data collection) with respect to sex, gender, or sexual orientation.</p>	<p>Sample characteristics or inclusion/exclusion criteria with respect to sex, gender, and sexual orientation are mentioned, but sex and gender are conflated (e.g., men are assumed to have penises or male biological attributes).</p>	<p>Sample characteristics or inclusion/exclusion criteria with respect to sex, gender, and sexual orientation are mentioned and applicant shows some understanding of the distinction between these concepts.</p> <p>However, no clear rationale is provided for their inclusion/exclusion criteria with respect to sex, gender, and sexual orientation.</p>	<p>Sample characteristics or inclusion/exclusion criteria with respect to sex, gender, and sexual orientation are described demonstrating an understanding of the distinction between these concepts.</p> <p>Applicant provides some rationale for their inclusion/exclusion criteria with respect to sex, gender, and sexual orientation.</p>	<p>Sample characteristics or inclusion/exclusion criteria with respect to sex, gender, and sexual orientation are clearly described demonstrating an understanding of the distinction between these concepts.</p> <p>Applicant provides a thorough and nuanced rationale for study inclusion/exclusion criteria with respect to sex, gender, and sexual orientation. For a score of 5, this information is integrated into the proposal itself.</p>