# Programme de création d'entreprise scientifique et innovante (CESI) (incluant une bourse de type postdoctorale) – 2026-2027

**URL :** https://frq.gouv.qc.ca/programme/programme-de-creation-dentreprise-scientifique-et-innovante-cesi-incluant-une-bourse-de-type-postdoctorale-2026-2027/

**BANNER**

Sector(s): DGDS, Nature et technologies, Santé, Société et culture

Competition year: 2026-2027

Deadline (application): January 29, 2026 at 16:00 EST

Announcement of results: Spring 2026

Amount: $75,000/year

Duration of funding: 18 months

**IMPORTANT NOTES!**

If you are an established researcher or a university interested in hosting a budding scientific entrepreneur, please contact the CESI team to find out about the minimum hosting requirements.

The electronic form is available in the FRQnet ePortfolio. To access the form, once you are logged in to your account, click on "Old FRQnet portal" and **select the Nature et Technologies section**, regardless of your research sector. The form is available under "Available competitions, Program: **Dissemination grants**".

**INTRODUCTION**

This program refers to the Common General Rules (CGR), which apply to all FRQ programs. Any specific conditions applicable to the CESI program are detailed here and take precedence over the CGR.

## 1. BACKGROUND

### 1.1 Scientific entrepreneurship in Québec

Scientific companies are built on the commercialization of public research results and the scientific skills of their teams. They benefit from extensive R&D capacity (many have their own laboratories, test benches or prototyping facilities) as well as highly diversified networks that enable them to think up bold projects and make strategic pivots to consider emerging needs.

As a result, such companies are highly agile and many of them are becoming essential to the development of a strong innovation ecosystem in Québec and to the advancement of promising sectors of activity both here and internationally in the form of cutting-edge technology companies as well as companies with a social and environmental impact.

### 1.2 Supporting the transition from research to entrepreneurship

The transition from academia to entrepreneurship means leaving one's comfort zone to face new uncertainties and a new culture. The support ecosystem is complex to navigate, making it difficult to find specific support for scientists with innovations stemming from research. Support programs focus on the development of the entrepreneurial project and less on the entrepreneurial attitude and mindset of the person behind it. The reality is that entrepreneurship calls for a different, albeit complementary, set of professional skills to those of academia, and requires rapid contact with the key players specific to the startup's sector of activity. Nevertheless, the development of innovation can benefit greatly from university connections and access to resources dedicated to the advancement of the most up-to-date knowledge. It is therefore a specific entrepreneurial trajectory that combines support for a new career path, the development of research-led innovation, and the construction of a network that spans sectors and ecosystems.

### 1.3 Partners consolidating their efforts

The FRQ, Mitacs, V1 Studio and Axelys are joining forces to offer a pathway specifically aimed at supporting researchers who want to start a business, whatever their reasons and whatever their journey to entrepreneurship (for details on the partners, see Section 10). With a single application, applicants receive support for their transition to entrepreneurship with the possibility of complementary funding and coaching focused on the individual as much as on the entrepreneurial solution. In the process, the startup creates long-term university connections as well as a network with non-academic stakeholders.

## 2. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

### 2.1 The program has the following objectives:

For applicants:

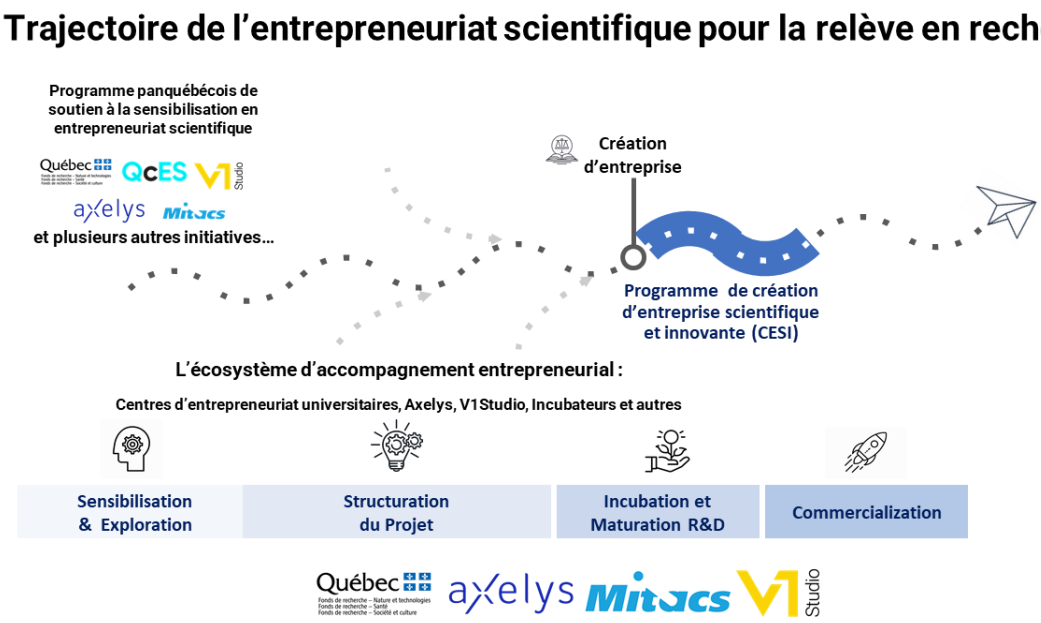
- Funding and support so they can focus on their business project;
- A clear pathway that facilitates linkage with a host university and an established researcher to help transform their research project into a scientific or innovative startup;
- Personal development.

For the ecosystem:

- Assist the academic community in enhancing the existing service offerings for researchers interested in entrepreneurship;
- Address cultural barriers to leverage the university connection as a springboard for the creation of scientific and innovative businesses;
- Promote the transfer of research results to society;
- Enhance the value of scientific entrepreneurship.

### 2.2 The path to scientific entrepreneurship and the profile sought for the CESI program

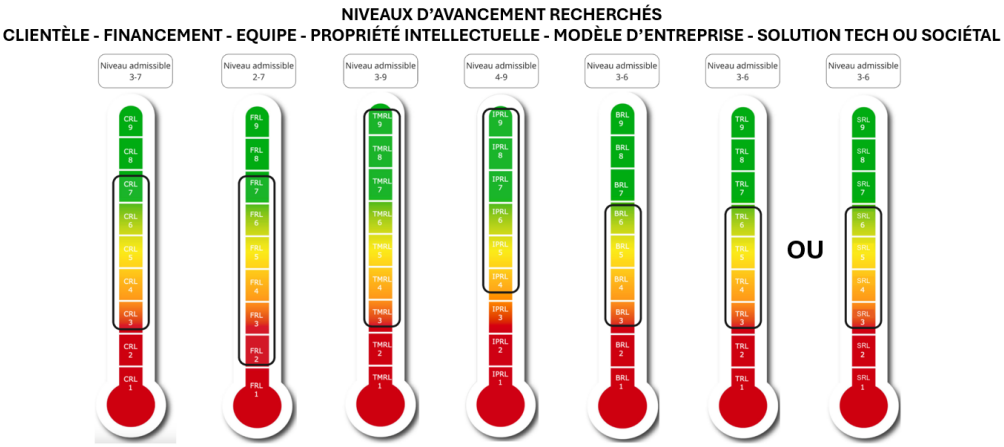
The program is intended for applicants who are already well on their way to scientific entrepreneurship and who wish to create or develop a scientific startup around a project requiring research.




Applicants are expected to demonstrate that they have:

- basic entrepreneurial skills;
- an innovative project requiring research and development;
- taken steps to become seriously engaged on the path to entrepreneurship.

The CESI team uses the KTH Innovation Readiness Levels to establish the profile of business projects submitted to the program. Readiness levels eligible to receive funding under the CESI program are as follows (see the accompanying document for details):




The program partners encourage applicants from a wide range of backgrounds to apply, regardless of their field or the theme of their research or innovation.

## 3. ELIGIBILITY

Only one applicant per company will be eligible (the first to submit an application).

To be eligible, applicants must:

- hold a doctoral degree issued no more than 5 years prior to the year in which the competition opens (e.g. for a competition opening in 2025, doctoral graduates who received their degree on or after January 1, 2020 will be eligible). Applicants who have not yet received their degree but who have submitted their thesis before entering the CESI program are also eligible;

- have legal status to work in Canada before entering the CESI program and for the duration of funding;

- in the event of funding and if applicable: provide proof that they are allowed to work in Canada. The following are accepted:
    - Canadian citizens: birth certificate or Canadian passport;
    - Immigrants: any of the immigration documents issued by the federal government specified on this page.

- have oral and written fluency in French and/or English in order to fully participate in the follow-up process;

- be domiciled in Québec (have a residential address in Québec, be present in Québec and available for in-person meetings throughout the duration of funding);

- commit to becoming incorporated at the federal or provincial level with a head office in Québec before entering the CESI program, if they have not already done so, in order to receive the award if selected for funding.

In the event of funding and to remain eligible, the awardee commits to:

- becoming a founding member of the company. Upon entering the program and for the duration of funding, the CESI awardee must hold more than 15% of the shares and the founding entrepreneurs must collectively hold more than 50% of the company, preventing external partner companies from holding a majority of the voting rights or control of the company.
- if the intellectual property (IP) was developed using university resources: providing confirmation of the filing of a declaration of invention with the university and negotiating the terms of an intellectual property transfer (license or assignment) with the relevant stakeholders;
  OR
  if the IP was developed without any university resources: demonstrating that the IP is royalty-free.

If an application is selected for funding, final acceptance will therefore be conditional on compliance with the commitments related to incorporation, the negotiation of intellectual property usage rights and the role as founding member of the company.

Please note!! The KTH innovation readiness levels for the entrepreneurial project as indicated in the application, as well as the information provided as supporting documentation (see Section 4), will be considered when assessing eligibility.

- In addition to the funding readiness level (FRL) requirement, please note that there is a maximum funding limit that must not be exceeded in order to be eligible for the program. Specifically, **applicants must not have raised more than $125,000** in equity (investment in exchange for shares in the company) or quasi-equity (SAFE, convertible debentures, KISS, etc.) This amount includes any funding from founders, friends, family, angel investors or investment funds. However, it excludes other types of funding such as loans, sales, grants, and subsidies.

- In addition to the customer readiness level (CRL) requirement, please note that **a minimum of 40 market validation interviews** must have been conducted before applying to CESI to be eligible for the program. For the purposes of this program, the CESI team defines an interview as the collection of data directly from a target audience of potential customers and industry/market experts **through semi-structured individual interviews**. Surveys without interaction with respondents are not considered eligible interviews for this program. In addition, the applicant must explain how the interviews contributed to the development of the entrepreneurial project.

**Important note related to eligibility**

- With regard to eligibility period and the requirement to hold a doctoral degree issued in the last 5 years, the following exceptions apply:
  - ***Extension:*** Applicants who have interrupted or delayed their research training after obtaining their doctorate for reasons such as parental leave, major family obligations, bereavement, a career period outside the research community or health reasons may be granted an eligibility period extension. In the case of an interruption for parental leave, family, bereavement or health reasons, the extension granted is equivalent to **twice the duration of the leave of absence**. In the case of an interruption for a career period outside the research community, the extension granted corresponds to the **duration of the interruption**. In the case of a slowdown, the FRQ will determine the duration of the extension based on the supporting documents provided with the application.
  - ***Exemption:*** Applicants who have interrupted or delayed their research training because of a disability may be granted an eligibility period exemption. This exemption is only available to applicants who meet the definition of "handicapped person" in the *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration* (CQLR, c. E-20.1).

  Exception requests and supporting documents must be submitted with the application form (see Section 4). Applicants wishing to request such an exception are advised to verify the admissibility of the exception with the program manager before submitting their application. The FRQ reserves the right to refuse any exception request that is not adequately justified.

## 4. REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

The electronic form is available in the FRQnet ePortfolio. To access the form, once you are logged in to your account, click on "Old FRQnet portal" and **select the Nature et Technologies section**, regardless of your research sector. The form is available under "Available competitions, Program: **Dissemination grants**".

You must complete the following sections of the form:

1. **A lay summary of the business project** (maximum 250 words)

2. **A section on your doctoral work** including a description of the link (direct or indirect) between it and the project presented (maximum 1 page)

You will need to attach the following to the FRQnet e-form:

3. **A presentation (to be uploaded in pdf format) describing the business project and its stage of development:** complete the document provided for this purpose and upload it in the "Application description" section. (Please note that the English version of the presentation document will be available soon). The following must be included**:**

   - Description of the problem to be solved by your business project and the importance of solving it;
   - The anticipated impact of your project;
   - The development stage of your project using the six KTH Innovation Readiness Level scales (see the accompanying document for the French version):
     - Business Model Readiness;
     - Customer Readiness;
     - Intellectual Property Readiness;
     - Team Readiness;
     - Funding Readiness;
     - Technology Readiness or Social Readiness (you may use the KTH Technology Readiness Level or an adaptation designed by Innovation Fund Denmark to determine social readiness; see the accompanying document for the French version).

   **Please justify, using examples or concrete evidence, why your project is at this level on each of the readiness scales.** This information is essential in order for the evaluation committee to fully understand the status of your project.

   Important note: the presentation is used to confirm the project's eligibility and by the committee in evaluating the application as described in Section 5.

**4. The applicant's abridged CV** (maximum two (2) pages), prepared according to the format indicated here, to be uploaded in the "Other documents" section;

**5. A copy of the applicant's doctoral degree or official attestation that the doctoral thesis has been submitted,** to be uploaded in the "Other documents" section.

**Important notes**

- Do not include letters of support or recommendation; the process of linking up with a university only begins once the applicant is selected for the CESI program.

- Although the FRQ excellence award is a postdoctoral-type fellowship, there is no requirement that the host university be different from the one that awarded the applicant's doctoral degree.

- Applicants seeking an **eligibility period exception** (see Important Notes in section 3) must provide the following:

- Request for extension:

    - **Justification of request for an eligibility period extension** (maximum 1 page): the applicant must justify the exception request and provide the dates and duration of the interruptions.
    - **Supporting documents**: documents supporting the exception request (e.g., medical certificate, disability certificate, child's birth certificate, caregiver tax credit application, official document or letter from employer, etc.) allowing the FRQ to determine the duration of the extension to be granted. Any supporting document for an exception request submitted in a language other than French or English must be accompanied by a translation.

- Request for exemption because of a disability:

    - **Justification of request for an eligibility period exemption** (maximum 1 page**)**: the applicant must demonstrate having considerable mobility restrictions due to medical reasons or a disability or major family obligations.
    - **Supporting documents** (e.g., medical certificate, disability certificate, etc.). Any supporting document for an exception request submitted in a language other than French or English must be accompanied by a translation.

  These documents must be attached in the "Other documents" section of the form and **will not be sent to the evaluation committee.**

## 5. EVALUATION

1. Eligibility assessment

   The first stage consists of validating the eligibility of each application. In addition to compliance with the eligibility requirements (Section 3) and the conformity of the documents submitted (as described in Section 4), the attached presentation (in pdf format) must clearly demonstrate the achievement of the milestones corresponding to the program's target business project profile (minimum and maximum KTH Innovation levels). The CESI team may contact the applicant during this process to obtain clarification on certain answers provided.

2. Evaluation by an independent committee

   Eligible applications are then evaluated by an independent committee formed in accordance with the requirements of the FRQ and in consultation with the four partners. This committee is made up of members recognized for their skills, expertise and achievements in relation to the objectives of the CESI program. Given the diverse profiles of committee members, applicants are encouraged to present their project in such a way as to be easily understood by an interdisciplinary and intersectoral committee.

To be recommended for funding under this program, an application must obtain an overall score of at least 70%. The number of awards is limited. Only the highest-ranked applicants will be considered for funding.

### Evaluation criteria

1. Quality of the entrepreneurial project (40%) (with consideration for innovation readiness levels)
   - Clarity and relevance of the problem to be solved and the solution proposed.
   - The startup stands out significantly from the competition, and its marketing strategy and business model demonstrate a coherent and promising vision.
   - The startup has an intellectual property strategy that has the potential to support its marketing strategy.
   - The founding team demonstrates strong entrepreneurial potential, appears dedicated, and includes the right people to reach the next inflection point.
   - The technological challenges/uncertainties associated with the project are well identified and addressable.
   - Demonstration of the realism of the entrepreneurial approach and potential for success in relation to the startup's sector of activity.

2. Impact of the project (social, economic, environmental) (30%)
   - The startup is aware of its negative externalities and is taking action to minimize them.
   - The startup demonstrates a positive social, environmental, or economic contribution.

3. Anticipated benefits of participation in the CESI program (30%)
   - Potential impact of CESI funding and support
     - For the applicant
     - For the startup
   - Demonstration of the need for linkage with a university

## 6. NATURE OF FUNDING

- An FRQ excellence award with an annual value of $75,000 (equivalent to a postdoctoral fellowship), paid to the individual. The award is for eighteen months;
- Advice and support for additional funding;
- Once final acceptance has been confirmed, coaching by V1 Studio and, if needed, by Axelys (for more details, see Section 7).

The FRQ award enables recipients to dedicate their time to developing the startup (business and marketing strategy, business and partnership development, market validation, etc.) and building on their key skills (business coaching, coaching in cross-disciplinary skills, knowledge of intellectual property, etc.).

Mitacs Accelerate funding may be added to support the development of the innovation at the core of the business project, thus securing additional resources and expertise and consolidating the necessary linkage with the university. However, the private contribution necessary for obtaining Mitacs funding must come from a funding source that is independent of the FRQ excellence award. Recipients will have to agree to comply with this requirement before each FRQ award payment.

Award recipients cannot combine a CESI award with **Mitacs Accelerate Entrepreneur** units. However, applicants may continue to receive Mitacs Accelerate Entrepreneur units during the application period and selection process. If selected for the CESI award, Mitacs funding must be paused before the first FRQ award payment and until the end of the scholarship period. The CESI team provides support in this regard.

For additional information, please refer to the rules in effect on the Mitacs website.

The mission of Axelys is to transfer innovations from university laboratories to startups and industry. It does this by accompanying startups through the key stages of their project: technological maturation, intellectual property protection, financing and more. The Axelys team brings its skills to the CESI program, helping to support the selected projects on their journey with its cutting-edge expertise in addition to providing access to complementary financing programs.

The V1 Studio team specializes in personal development during the transition from an academic project to an entrepreneurial venture. It draws on its ties with universities and a large number of incubators and accelerators to identify specific opportunities for scientific companies in the ecosystem. The V1 Studio team provides support from the moment the recipient enters the CESI program, including personalized plans for skills development, project advancement and linkage with the ecosystem, as well as follow-up meetings to update objectives (for more details, see Section 7).

**Important notes!**

The FRQ excellence award is for the exclusive benefit of the person selected for the CESI program and should not be used to finance projects submitted to other government programs, including programs offered by the Ministère de l'Économie, de l'Innovation et de l'Énergie (MEIE), the Fonds du développement économique (managed by Investissement Québec) or any other organization mandated by the MEIE, including Mitacs and sector-based industrial research groups.

It is the applicant's responsibility to communicate with the CESI program team regarding the project's financial structure should any additional funding be considered in order to remain eligible for the FRQ award.

## 7. FOLLOW-UP

Following a CESI program orientation meeting with V1 Studio, a personalized annual plan is drawn up, including plans for skills development, project advancement and linkage with the ecosystem. Coaching meetings are scheduled every two weeks. Targets and milestones are reviewed quarterly.

A progress report, the format of which will be communicated in due course, must be sent to the FRQ.

## 8. IMPORTANT DATES, ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESULTS AND EFFECTIVE DATE

- Deadline for submission of applications: January 29, 2026, at 16:00 EST
- Announcement of final acceptances and entry into the program: Spring 2026

These rules apply to the 2026-2027 financial year.

## 9. TERMS OF THE FUNDING

### The FRQ excellence award

To retain the award, persons entering the CESI program must:

- Comply with the conditions related to domicile for the duration of the award;
- Comply with the rules and expectations set out by the host university;
- Have made an initial thesis submission at the start of the award and meet the requirements for obtaining their doctoral degree at the time of the second instalment;
- Dedicate themselves full-time to the creation of their startup. An annual vacation period is allowed and must be prearranged with V1 Studio upon entry into the CESI program in order to integrate it into the project advancement plan and quarterly targets;
- Be present for periodic meetings with V1 Studio;
- Comply with the rules related to concurrent funding (Section 9.1);
- Comply with the rules related to paid employment (Section 9.2).

Failure to comply with these rules may result in the cancellation of the award. If, for exceptional reasons, these conditions cannot be met, the FRQ must be notified as soon as possible and will determine whether the award should continue or be cancelled.

### 9.1 Concurrent funding with the FRQ award

This award may not be held concurrently with:

- Merit-based scholarships from Canadian funding agencies such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA), etc.;
- Merit-based scholarships from Québec funding agencies such as the Fonds de recherche du Québec (Société et culture, Santé and Nature et technologies sectors), including Inventech program grants (FRQ-Axelys partnership), Science Impact (managed by Esplanade and funded by the FRQ) and Grad2VC (managed by Front Row Venture and funded by the FRQ), the Conseil de recherches en pêche et agroalimentaire du Québec (CORPAQ), etc.;
- A Mitacs Accelerate Entrepreneur award (see Section 6 for further details).
- Scholarships from the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) or the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (CALQ) for the same project.

This award may be held concurrently with:

- Private sector and internal university scholarships.

The FRQ excellence award under this program is for the exclusive benefit of the person selected for the CESI program and should not be used to finance projects submitted to other government programs (see Section 6 for details).

### 9.2 Paid employment under the FRQ award

A person entering the CESI program may accept additional paid employment provided that:

- the position does not exceed 250 hours of work per four-month period;
- the employment does not interfere with the achievement of the objectives set out in the plans for skills development, project advancement and linkage with the ecosystem.

The FRQ considers that teaching a 45-hour course is equivalent to 150 hours of employment. Note that the same course given to two different groups during the same semester is considered equivalent to two teaching assignments.

### 9.3 Deferral and supplement during parental leave (FRQ award)

Please refer to Section 6.13 of the FRQ's Common General Rules.

## 10. PARTNERS

**FRQ**:

The Fonds de recherche du Québec (FRQ) is a Québec government agency whose mission is to support the strategic and coherent development of scientific research in Quebec in the sectors of natural sciences and engineering, health sciences, social sciences and humanities, arts and literature. The FRQ's Directorate of Major Societal Challenges (DGDS) stimulates intersectoral, solution-oriented research based on the co-construction of knowledge and practices and the integration of science and society.

**Axelys:**

Axelys is the development and innovation transfer company for public research in Québec. It contributes to the province's economic and social prosperity by accelerating the maturation and deployment of high-potential inventions, know-how and processes to turn them into innovations that can improve the world we live in. In addition, Axelys contributes to the creation of scientific startups stemming from public research.

**Mitacs:**

For over 20 years, Mitacs has been helping organisations achieve their business goals, funding cutting-edge innovation, and creating employment opportunities for students and postdoctoral researchers. Mitacs generates economic growth, productivity, and tangible changes to improve the quality of life for all Canadians. Its mission is to create a world-class, diverse community of innovators through its collaborative model in order to inspire and design creative solutions.

**V1 Studio:**

V1 Studio is a non-profit organization that provides a safe space for researchers to explore entrepreneurship. V1 Studio leads tailored programs to support researchers and graduate students in the early stages of their entrepreneurial journey. We help them develop their potential and, if they are ready, establish a scientific or innovative startup.

## 11. CONTACT

**Pour le FRQ :**

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Site web du programme CESI