Policy Spark Research Grants

Guide for applicants — B.C. Greenhouse gas mitigation and clean economy

Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions

April 2026

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1. About the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions

The Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions (PICS) catalyzes and mobilizes research, partnerships, and knowledge that generate climate action in British Columbia and around the world. PICS is a multi-university institute encompassing the four major research-intensive universities in British Columbia: the University of Victoria, University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, and the University of Northern British Columbia.

In the face of accelerating climate challenge, PICS is increasing its investment in collaboration, research, and knowledge mobilization, guided by our Strategic Plan: 2024 and Beyond. Our work focuses on solutions to the most pressing climate issues facing people, communities, and the land. PICS is a values-based organization committed to equity and to reconciliation, justice, diversity, and inclusion.

2. Research grant information

Policy Spark Grants are part of PICS' Decision Impact program stream. Through this stream, PICS works to bridge academic expertise and practitioner needs, helping governments and organizations act with confidence in a changing climate.

Policy Spark Grants provide small, rapid-turnaround funding for research that addresses emerging climate policy issues in British Columbia. This program is designed to mobilize credible, actionable insights that inform public debate and support evidence-based decisions on the province's most pressing challenges.

2.1 Eligibility and grant details

Feature	Description
Eligible applicants	Applicants must be faculty at PICS-affiliated universities (UBC, UBC-O, UVic, SFU, and UNBC). Individuals may only participate in one application. Post-doctoral and graduate students must have their faculty supervisor lead the application. Adjunct faculty are eligible so long as they can hold research funds at their university.
Grant amount	$20,000 per project. Funds disbursed 75% up front and 25% upon approval of the midterm report. Funds transferred to university accounts. University overhead is an ineligible expense.
Project timeline	7-month grant period.* Applications due May 31, 2026. Grant period: July 1, 2026 to January 31, 2027.

	* Research funded related to topic 2 (beyond rebates for clean technology adoption) will have a grant period of 3-months to September 31, 2026.
Eligible topics	Research proposals must focus on one of six thematic areas for which more information is provided below: 1. climate progress indicators 2. beyond rebates for household and small business clean technology adoption 3. gas utility transition and new revenue opportunities 4. electrification of critical mineral mine operations 5. social cost of carbon in decision-making 6. quantifying co-benefits of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in BC See section 2.2 for more information.
Total budget	PICS is aiming to fund approximately six to eight projects. PICS will aim for balance across thematic areas and across the PICS university network.

2.2 Research themes and topics

PICS is launching a broad program of research on B.C. greenhouse gas mitigation policy that draws on the priorities identified through the CleanBC Independent Review Panel's Appendix A, recommendations and research gaps identified through PICS' CleanBC Insight Series, and consultations with practitioners and researchers in early 2026.

Within this broader PICS program of research on B.C. greenhouse gas mitigation policy, six thematic areas have been identified for Policy Sparks Grants. Focused research on these themes will directly address barriers to emissions mitigation and clean energy, specifically evaluating the feasibility, affordability, economic rationale, and public policy case for emissions-reducing investments and policy. Each research topic targets a specific information gap that, if filled, could unlock progress toward decarbonization.

The six research themes work together. Research on leading climate progress indicators will support communication of climate action in a more relatable and tangible manner. Research on household and small business clean technology rebates, future revenue models for gas utilities, and electrification of mine operations support specific sectors overcoming economic barriers. Research on incorporating social cost of carbon into public decision-making and articulating the integrated benefits of climate action examine different dimensions of the cost of climate inaction.

A set of illustrative research outcomes is provided for each theme. Proposals should demonstrate a clear definition of the specific aspect of the policy problem they are

addressing, the research methodology, and a realistic path to actionable findings within the grant timeline.

2.2.1. Climate progress indicators

Policy problem:

Emissions indicators are all too often used as the proxy for climate action in public discourse. While foundational to planning and evaluating climate policy, these abstract concepts may not resonate with the public's immediate concerns or convey tangible outcomes. Furthermore, emissions inventories are lagging (published two years after the fact) and do not capture the pace or direction of transition in real time. In contrast, leading indicators, such as electric vehicle adoption rates, heat pump installations, grid emissions intensity, building retrofit activity, and clean energy investment, are more relatable. They connect to everyday concerns such as affordability and jobs, and showcase real progress. While these are available from existing sources, including the many in the B.C. government's annual Climate Change Accountability Report, they remain less prominent in the debate on climate progress, which focuses on the gap to emission reduction targets. The urgency of developing an effective, succinct, and relatable framework for reporting on climate progress has grown as B.C. reconsiders its climate commitments and public confidence in government accountability on climate has declined. Such indicators would serve multiple audiences: government decision makers, media, advocacy organizations, and the public.

Example research outcomes:

- Public opinion or stakeholder engagement that tests which indicators resonate most with different audiences, potentially in partnership with polling and research organizations.
- A review of emerging best practices for climate communication of indicators, including frameworks from other jurisdictions (e.g. communication strategies for conveying to the public, and metrics for conveying progress).
- A methodology for assembling and updating a B.C. climate progress dashboard, including data sources, update frequency, and institutional hosting options.

2.2.2. Beyond rebates for clean technology adoption

Policy problem:

Conventional point-of-sale rebates, incentives, and grant programs for household and small business clean technologies such as electric vehicles, heat pumps, and retrofits have become increasingly difficult for governments running structural deficits to fund. Evidence is needed on what types of programs are used in other jurisdictions to accelerate adoption

of clean technology by households and small businesses without increasing operational budgets, and whether these programs are suitable for B.C. Concessionary financing beyond government-funded rebates—for example utility-leasing and distributed energy resource business models—show promise. Understanding which mechanisms work best for different consumer segments, building types and technology categories would help governments and utilities design more efficient transition support.

Example research outcomes:

- A comparative analysis of innovative financing mechanisms, and delivery agents for household and small business clean technology adoption (e.g., on-bill financing, property-assessed clean energy, utility leasing models, energy-as-a-service), examining effectiveness, barriers to adoption, consumer acceptance, and suitability for B.C. regulatory and market contexts.
- An assessment of which clean technology financing mechanisms work best for specific consumer segments (renters, multi-unit building residents, low-income households, small businesses), technology types, and building contexts, with recommendations for policy and program design.

Note: Research funded related to this topic will have an advanced deadline of September 31, 2026.

2.2.3. Gas utility transition and new revenue opportunities

Policy problem:

The transition away from fossil fuels is eroding the core business model of gas distribution utilities. As building electrification accelerates and gas demand plateaus and declines, utilities face a strategic question: whether and how to redeploy their infrastructure, capital, and customer relationships toward new revenue streams. In other jurisdictions, gas utilities have begun leasing heat pumps to homeowners, offering on-bill financing, and providing energy-as-a-service, earning regulated returns while shifting the cost burden away from households and governments that can no longer sustain large point-of-sale rebates. In B.C., the regulatory landscape is entering a period of potential change as the B.C. Utilities Commission explores the future of gas distribution, but independent research examining what viable transition pathways look like from regulatory, business, and financial perspectives is lacking. Without credible analysis of new business models and the regulatory reforms needed to enable them, the window currently open in B.C. may close before meaningful change takes shape.

Example research outcomes:

- A jurisdictional analysis of gas utility transition strategies and regulatory reform models in Quebec, the European Union, and other relevant jurisdictions, with attention to new revenue opportunities from distributed energy resources, electrification services, and energy-as-a-service models, and with assessment of applicability in the B.C. regulatory context.
- An evidence-based assessment of forecasts of demand for use of natural gas residentially and commercially that elucidates assumptions (e.g. population/housing growth, commercial use and growth, energy source availability and relative prices, retrofits versus new development, and government policy) and the implications. These forecasts and scenarios could then be used to contrast outcomes for regulated natural gas suppliers under different regulations covering their rates of return.

2.2.4. Electrification of critical mineral mine operations

Policy problem:

British Columbia is positioning itself as a supplier of critical minerals for the global clean energy transition. The competitive advantage of B.C.-sourced minerals depends in part on their carbon intensity, as buyers and trade frameworks are increasingly differentiated by the emissions profile of extraction. Realizing that advantage requires mine operations to shift from diesel-dependent power and equipment toward electrified alternatives, but many remote mine sites lack the transmission infrastructure, electricity pricing frameworks, and regulatory signals to make that transition viable. Quebec, Ontario, and the Yukon have each pursued mine electrification through different policy models that B.C. has not yet systematically examined. Without a clear strategy and framework linking critical mineral development to electrification, B.C. risks undermining the market advantage that makes its mineral resources attractive.

Example research outcomes:

- A jurisdictional comparison of mine electrification strategies in Quebec, Ontario, and the Yukon, examining transmission infrastructure models, who pays for the grid expansion, electricity pricing frameworks, and policy levers such as environmental impact assessment requirements, with implications for B.C.
- An assessment of electrification needs for new critical mineral mines and mine expansions in, or planning on entering provincial regulatory processes, including power and transmission requirements and the electricity rates necessary to ensure the financial viability of these projects as well as avoiding self-generation using natural gas (“behind the fence” generation). Included in this assessment should also be an analysis on these mine proposals’ potential contribution to grid stability

through curtailment and energy storage. This assessment should also include opportunities for these mine projects to self-generate without using fossil fuels and which projects have the greatest opportunity for self-generation.

- An analysis of which areas of the province (e.g. northeast B.C.) have insufficient capacity or transmission infrastructure to support new and expanded critical mineral mines, the reasons why these areas have insufficient capacity (e.g. power already allocated to other industries), and the economic impacts (e.g. jobs, GDP, crown revenues) of lags in or failure to develop the mines due to lack of transmission or delays in infrastructure build-out.

2.2.5. Social cost of carbon in decision-making

Policy problem:

The federal government publishes a social cost of carbon (SCC), a monetary value assigned to the economic damages from each additional tonne of emissions and used in policy-making to weigh the benefits of reducing emissions against the costs. Yet this foundational metric for policy evaluation is not incorporated into B.C. Treasury Board decisions, capital allocation, regulatory impact assessments, or investment evaluation frameworks. This means that capital investment decisions, program evaluations, and regulatory choices lack a consistent metric for comparing the value of emissions reductions across sectors and policy domains.

Example research outcomes:

- An applied analysis of how a social cost of carbon has been incorporated into Treasury Board capital investment decision-making and regulatory impact assessments in Canada and comparable jurisdictions. What lessons can be drawn that are applicable to B.C. from cases of its use (and non-use) in terms of climate regulation development or investment.

2.2.6. Quantifying co-benefits of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in BC

Policy problem:

Greenhouse gas reduction delivers benefits that extend well beyond the climate rationale: improved air quality and reduced healthcare costs, lower household energy expenditures, enhanced energy security, sustained ecosystem services, industrial competitiveness in markets that reward low-carbon production, and community safety through reduced wildfire risk and infrastructure resilience. When stacked together, the cumulative value of reaching greenhouse gas reduction targets is substantial, but the individual benefits have not been systematically quantified in the B.C. context. PICS is seeking research that measures specific, tangible benefits of greenhouse gas reduction measures in B.C.,

expressed as avoided costs or measurable value gains, with province-wide applicability and clear relevance to public investment decisions.

Example research outcomes:

- A quantified assessment of one specific co-benefit of greenhouse gas reduction in B.C., expressed as an avoided cost or measurable value gain, with province-wide applicability. Options could include healthcare cost savings from improved air quality, reduced wildfire suppression expenditures from landscape-level emissions management, or household energy cost reductions from electrification.
- An analysis of the energy security and economic resilience benefits of reduced fossil fuel dependence in B.C., including avoided exposure to commodity price volatility, reduced balance-of-trade outflows, and enhanced reliability of electrified systems.

3. Application process and evaluation

3.1. Process

Applicants should submit a proposal via the application form on the PICS website by May 31, 2026 at 11:59 pm PST. The application template is included in Appendix 1 and should be filled in and submitted through PICS' website.

In keeping with this program's focus on near-term policy impact and PICS' core mandate, proposals must convincingly demonstrate that the research will produce findings useful to decision makers in BC within the grant timeline.

3.2. Evaluation

Funding decisions will be made with input from an advisory group consisting of PICS staff, PICS Climate Fellows, and external experts. PICS will communicate decisions approximately three weeks after the application deadline. PICS reserves the right to conditionally accept applications based on minor feedback and corresponding revisions from the applicant.

Proposal component	Value / 100	Scoring considerations
Identification	Y/N	PI is eligible for funding (mandatory).
Proposal (50%)		
1a. Working title of research	N/A	Not scored
1b. Topic focus area	Y/N	Proposal responds to one of the six thematic areas (mandatory).
1c. Research question	15	The research question is reasonably scoped and well articulated.
1d. Methodology	20	The applicant demonstrates a strong grasp of the issue area (available data, common methods, existing literature). The proposed research builds on previous or ongoing work by the PI.
1e. Timeline	15	The proposal is feasible given the time and resources available.
Impact (50%)		
1f. Connection to policy problem	25	The nature and implications of the policy problem are clearly articulated. The research question is clearly linked to the policy problem. The research will produce evidence useful to decision makers in B.C.
1g. Collaborators	10	The project will support student learning and skill growth.
1h. History of knowledge mobilization (CV of PI)	15	The PI has demonstrated an ability to write effectively for a general audience. The PI has a strong understanding of relevant decision-making pathways. The PI has a history of applied research.
Fit with PICS goals	Y/N	Contributes to balance of portfolio across thematic areas and PICS universities.

4. Expected deliverables

Funded researchers will be required to:

- Attend a half-day virtual workshop on writing for decision-makers in August 2026 (TBD).
- Provide a two-page midterm update by September 31, 2026.
- Provide a concise research report (~20 pages) written for a decision-maker audience. Researchers will be encouraged to utilize visual abstracts or summaries for decision-makers in addition to a conventional abstract. Deadlines of September 31, 2026 for topic 2, and of January 31, 2027, for all other topics.

PICS retains first right to publish the research report and associated materials developed through this work. The research team retains the rights to publish, rep-purposes, and further develop the framework or analysis afterwards.

Appendix 1: Application template and instructions

Please provide full contact information for the primary investigator (PI). This individual must have a faculty position at UNBC, SFU, UVic, or UBC and be able to oversee a research account at the institution.

Name:

Title and institutional affiliation:

Email:

Part 1: Proposal

Write for a general, policy-literate audience. Avoid technical jargon and use accessible language that clearly conveys the real-world importance of your work. You may cite relevant sources in any consistent reference format.

1a. Working title of research (up to 80 characters)

Provide a short working title that clearly identifies the focus of your project.

1b. Topic focus area (select one)

- Climate progress indicators
- Beyond rebates for household and small business clean technology adoption
- Gas utility transition and new revenue opportunities
- Electrification of critical mineral mine operations
- Social cost of carbon in decision-making
- Quantifying co-benefits of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in BC

1c. Research question (up to 200 words)

Briefly describe the central research question your project will address. Clearly state what you aim to learn or uncover, and define the scope so it is feasible within the project timeline. The question should be specific, actionable, and clearly connected to the chosen thematic area.

1d. Methods (up to 200 words)

Describe the approach you will use to answer your research question. Outline key data sources, analytical methods, or engagement activities. Indicate whether any research

ethics approvals will be required. If relevant, explain how this project connects to your existing research or collaborations. Demonstrate feasibility within the short project timeline.

1e. Timeline (up to 250 words)

Provide an outline of the key activities and milestones for your project, organized by month or project phase. The timeline should reflect the 8-month funding period and include major deliverables such as data collection, analysis, drafting, and final report submission. Demonstrate that your work plan is achievable within the timeframe.

1f. Connection to policy problem (up to 250 words)

Explain how your anticipated findings could inform or support decisions related to your chosen policy issue. Describe the policy context or decision environment in which your research question sits. Clarify how your work could provide timely evidence, analysis, or insight that supports practical action. Note who might use your findings and how results could be communicated or applied.

1g. Collaborators (up to 100 words)

List any collaborators involved in the project, including students, faculty, or practitioners. Briefly describe each person's anticipated contribution. Projects that support student learning and skill growth are encouraged.

1h. History of knowledge mobilization (up to 100 words)

Provide up to three examples of how you have shared research findings with non-academic audiences. Examples could include policy briefs, op-eds, workshops, public reports, or blogs. You may include hyperlinks or upload documents that are not publicly available.

Part 2: PI resume/CV

Please attach a resume or CV for the PI, including position and education, and highlighting awards, service and community engagement, publications, and other achievements relevant to the proposal.

Part 3: PI signature

- I attest that all collaborators have read, contributed to, and approve of this application.

Principal investigator name:

Use of artificial intelligence in submission of application

PICS recognizes that generative AI may be a tool to applicants in the preparation of applications. Applicants should be aware that using generative AI may lead to the presentation of information without proper recognition of authorship or acknowledgement.

PICS requests that if artificial intelligence is used for the purposes of this application, you briefly describe that use.

Please describe any other sources of funding that will be leveraged or contributed to this work.

Signature: