

**University Delegates WebEx Meeting**  
**April 23, 2020 - 12:30-1:30 pm EDT**  
**Minutes**

Chair: Adrian Mota, Associate Vice President, Research Programs

## **1. CIHR Updates and Clarifications**

### **Spring 2020 Project Grant Competition**

- CIHR's emergency funding for COVID-19 research was not taken from the Project Grant envelope. It is specifically a component of the Government of Canada response to this crisis
- CIHR will be using up to \$31 million of the Spring 2020 Project Grant money for the one-year financial extensions.
- The remaining approximate \$244 million will be reinvested into the Project Grant Program to help mitigate the effects of increased application pressures for future competitions.
  - CIHR has received recommendations to invest that money in the Fall 2020 Project Grant competition. The exact use of the money still needs to be determined.

### **Fall 2020 Project Grant Competition**

- CIHR intends to have a Fall 2020 Project Grant competition.
- CIHR is aware of the impacts from COVID-19 and is considering various options for this competition
- Because of this, the Fall 2020 Project Grant competition could look very different to what has been done in the past. In the likely scenario where face-to-face peer review is not possible for the Fall 2020 Project Grant competition, CIHR is considering options including remote peer review or a hybrid approach.
- CIHR intends to engage the community in this process and has suggested the creation of a working group comprised of UDEC and UD members and others to consider and provide input towards various options.

### **Natural Science and Engineering Research Council's One-Year Grant Renewal**

- On April 8 the Natural Science and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) announced that all active Discovery Grant recipients can elect to receive a one-year extension with funds at their current funding level. We have received several inquiries about whether CIHR could also take this approach.
  - CIHR has decided that it will not offer one-year extensions to all of its investigator-initiated grant holders for the following reason, the actual total cost for NSERC to provide this extension to all of its Discovery grants is significantly less than what it would cost CIHR;
  - There are many important differences between CIHR and NSERC's approach to funding, however, when considering total cost it is important to note that the success rate and renewal rate of NSERC's Discovery Grants are significantly higher than CIHR's Project Grants, with about 85% of Discovery Grant applicants successfully renewing their grant. This makes the total cost of extending these grants significantly different and, while the approach has some merit, one main reason why it is not plausible for CIHR.

#### *Question from members:*

- If a Nominated Principal Investigator (NPI) wanted to renew two grants in the canceled Project Grant Spring competition, can they choose to extend one and still apply to the Project Grant Fall 2020 competition with the other?
  - An answer to this question was not available at the time of the meeting. By accepting the one-year funding extension for any grant they can no longer apply to the fall 2020 Project Grant competition as an NPA.
- Would it be possible to potentially fund more proposals from the Fall 2019 Project Grant competition that were close to the cut-off, even for a shorter window (e.g., 3 years) since these have been reviewed and scored very

high. Assuming 50 panels and funding 3 more in each panel at overall average grant size of \$140/year for 3 years would give a total investment of \$63 million.

- CIHR is considering all options available to support the effects of COVID-19 on the research community. More will be shared when information is available.
- Will Principal Investigators (PIs) already in their one-year no-cost extension be eligible for the financed 12-month extension and student and Post-Doctoral Fellow (PDF) support of their active Project Grant?
  - CIHR explained that many scenarios were considered to inform a decision regarding how to proceed with support for the cancellation of the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition. CIHR decided to use the window of expiry dates (June 30, 2020- March 30, 2021) to determine eligibility for funding extensions. CIHR remains committed to monitoring the situation as it continues to evolve and will consider other support mechanisms, such as suggested, if necessary. Feedback shared by the UD Network continues to be shared with CIHR for consideration.
- The financial extension applies only to Nominated Principal Applicants (NPAs) who currently hold an investigator-initiated research grant expiring between June 30, 2020 and March 30, 2021 and who applied to the Spring 2020 competition. Why was March 30<sup>th</sup> chosen as an end date as opposed to March 31?
  - CIHR explained that the dates were selected with continuity of funding in mind. Grants expiring on March 31, 2020 were excluded because, from a continuity of funding perspective, these individuals could applying to the Fall 2020 competition as there grant expires March 31, 2021 and the grants start April 1, 2021. It was also noted that most grants within the window expire on June 30, 2020 and September 30, 2020.
- Can CIHR explain the announcement about the trainee funding for people with training awards as well as for those paid from grants?
  - CIHR applauds the recent announcement from the Government of Canada, which introduces new measures to assist research trainees impacted by the unprecedented crisis. CIHR explained that the Tri-Councils (CIHR, NSERC and SSHRC) are waiting for information regarding the conditions of the funding for trainees and will then be able to communicate the details.
- Why can't there be a delayed review of the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition by remote panel?
  - CIHR confirmed that they do not intend to do a delayed peer review for the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition. This is currently not operationally feasible as CIHR remains focused on responding to core Government priorities around COVID-19 research, particularly as new announcements are made by the Federal Government (e.g., April 23 announcement regarding critical research funding programs).
- If PIs currently in their no-cost extension cannot benefit from the 12-month financial support, can they qualify their students/PDFs presently on their grants to benefit from the Government student support program?
  - CIHR confirmed that the intention for the money that was announced is to support trainees paid from grants, however, the details still need to be confirmed. It was noted that trainees cannot benefit from more than one subsidy program and this will need to be managed.
- Thinking towards future competitions, what measures will be taken in upcoming review cycles to account for the fact that researchers connected to certain settings (i.e. hospitals, long-term care facilities) likely will be more delayed in getting back to their labs than researchers in Universities?
  - CIHR will implement measures (to be defined) that consider the impact COVID-19 on individual circumstances within the peer review process. CIHR recognized that this is an important consideration, particularly when designing the Fall competition. CIHR confirmed that this question should be raised with the working group to seek ideas and input.
- Has there been a specific decision about CIHR's Canada Research Chairs (CRCs) and the research costs from the budget of the CRC holder during the shutdown period of their research labs?
  - The Tri-agency Institutional Programs Secretariat (TIPS) recognizes that agency-funded research activities may be delayed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the Canada Research Chairs program, provisions have been put in place for no cost extensions for up to 12 months for grants with an end date between February 1, 2020, and March 31, 2021, inclusively. TIPS continues to analyze and implement necessary changes to their programs as they monitor the evolving impact of COVID-19 and

will make further adjustments as needed. If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Secretariat at: [information@chairs-chaire.gc.ca](mailto:information@chairs-chaire.gc.ca)

- The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has gone to a fully remote review. Perhaps CIHR could consider what they are doing.
  - CIHR recognized the NIH has initiated a remote review process and confirmed that CIHR will find out more about their new approach to learn how they are doing it (e.g. accessing a more secure videoconferencing software), what they are using and lessons learned from their experience.
- Rather than the request to fund all current grants, is there a hybrid approach option? This could be done by narrowing to identify a targeted group based on who applied for funds.
  - While CIHR has focused on the broader context of the Canadian research community, CIHR acknowledges that not all labs are impacted in the same way (e.g., some labs have multiple funding sources; some labs will take time to resume where they left off before the pandemic). CIHR confirmed they will continue to consider different options, such as applying different filters to explore various target groups.
- Early Career Investigators (ECI) Foundation holders were offered to submit Project Grant applications early. They were notified late in January 2019 and could not best prepare for the Spring 2019, and now the Spring 2020 is cancelled. This represents two rounds of opportunities lost for them. It would be fair to let them benefit from the 12-month financed extension.
  - CIHR confirmed that they will analyze the data from a cohort perspective to better understand impacts due to COVID-19.
- There has been a misunderstanding in the community that references Dr. Strong's original message of April 2<sup>nd</sup> on CIHR's website. That statement has been corrected with a footnote. Can CIHR communicate to the community that a clarification has been provided on the web site?
  - CIHR confirmed that a communication will be sent to the community to inform about the clarification made to Dr. Strong's original message.
- Is there any potential support available to the PIs who were unsuccessful in one or more previous competitions?
  - CIHR explained that it is a large group and it is difficult to define parameters of support. The suggested models would be hard to pull from the available data, but it is a subject that CIHR could start to conceptualize and CIHR can take the question back for consideration.
- If the NPI changes on the grant, will it still be eligible for the extension?
  - CIHR indicated the decision was made based on expiry date and not based on NPI. A change in NPI should not impact eligibility of extension.
- Why has CIHR changed the decision on the one year renewal and is now limited to only those who applied for the renewal?
  - CIHR confirmed that it was always the intention to limit the renewal to those who applied to the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition. This option introduces a level of fairness towards continuity of funding. It supports those who actually came forward and submitted a grant to that Spring competition.
- Given the cancellation of the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition and potential increased numbers of applications coming into the Project Grant Fall 2020 competition, has CIHR considered defining a maximum budget to get more individuals in the system?
  - CIHR confirmed that there is an opportunity to explore these types of suggestions through the working group.
- Is CIHR expecting additional funding for the labs due to productivity drop?
  - CIHR confirmed that they continue to work on this issue to help individuals mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. More information will be shared when available.
- Researchers at some universities may be furloughed so they are no longer considered fulltime faculty which would make them ineligible to hold Tri-Council grants. How can CIHR respond to such actions?
  - CIHR acknowledged that this is an unfortunate scenario and will follow up with their financial department to explore options for individuals in that situation.

- Some of the large institute funded projects are funded by both CIHR and partner organizations. Some of these organizations are not able to meet their partnership contributions. Is CIHR thinking of ways to fill that gap?
  - CIHR is aware of this issue and is exploring what role CIHR might play in support of the health research ecosystem. More information will be shared when available.

## **2. Adjournment**

- The meeting ended at 14:00. The next meeting of the University Delegates will be on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020.