

University Delegates WebEx Meeting
July 9th, 2020 - 12:30-1:30 pm EDT
Minutes

Chair: Adrian Mota, Associate Vice President, Research Programs

1. CIHR Updates

Spring 2020 Project Grant Competition

- Work is now well under way for the delivery of the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition.

Technology:

- CIHR released an [announcement \(en français\)](#) the afternoon following the UD meeting, to inform the community that CIHR will be using Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) software to deliver live web-based peer review committee meetings.
- While the peer review process for the Project Grant competition will remain the same (e.g., reviewers will indicate their ability to review and any conflicts, they will submit preliminary scores and written reviews for their assigned applications remotely), the in-person meeting component will move online. This means that the discussions will now take place via live web conferencing. CIHR is working to ensure that the process for the meeting will otherwise remain as close to normal as possible.
- Taking the competition needs and feasibility considerations into account, CIHR chose MS Teams for a few reasons:
 - Microsoft was awarded the “Digital Communications and Collaboration Platform” contract with the Government of Canada, which means that CIHR will not be required to take any additional procurement steps to use MS Teams (that may have otherwise delayed peer review);
 - MS Teams meets the Government of Canada security requirements, which is critical to ensure the protection of sensitive information discussed during peer review meetings;
 - MS Teams and the tools in the Microsoft 365 suite have been used at CIHR since May 2020, giving staff the chance to become familiar with the features used to host live events and large meetings; and
 - The meetings will be accessible by reviewers via a variety of web browsers.
- CIHR recognizes that many members of the research community are likely more familiar with other web conferencing platforms, such as Zoom. These other platforms have merit, but—and this is a critical component in a government setting—they do not have a contract with the Government of Canada, which means they are not supported by the government IT infrastructure and they have not yet been assessed for regular government security requirements.
- While it is true that Canada’s own Parliament has used Zoom for meetings, it’s important to note that meetings held by the House of Commons are public, unclassified, and meant to be accessible by all Canadians—but peer review committee meetings are none of those things, so the security requirements are different.
- Materials will be provided to support peer review committee members and ensure that the remote review experience is user-friendly.
- Virtual training sessions will also be offered to allow peer review participants to learn how to use MS Teams in advance of their own committee meetings.

Statistics of Financial Extensions Numbers:

- There were 173 applications withdrawn from the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition leaving a total of 2,131 applications to review this competition.

- Spring 2020 applications submitted by Nominated Principal Applicants (NPAs) who did not receive a financial extension will be reviewed (unless specifically withdrawn by the NPAs).
- 10 NPAs who were offered a financial extension linked to a bridge grant accepted the final extension. These extensions represent \$536 445.
- 154 NPAs who were offered a financial extension linked to their Investigator-Initiated Research (IIR) grant accepted the financial extension. These extensions represent \$22 150 507.

Competition Updates:

- Peer review committee recruitment went well. Chairs, Scientific Officers, and reviewers can expect to receive detailed instructions and committee-specific information (dates, times, links) in the coming weeks.
- It is likely that the interval of time between receiving reviewer feedback of the Spring competition and the Fall competition deadline will be fairly short.
- CIHR is working to reintroduce the Notice of Recommendation step, and anticipates that applicants would receive the Notice of Recommendation for the Spring competition approximately six weeks before the full application deadline for the Fall 2020 competition.

Fall 2020 Project Grant Competition

- On June 8, [CIHR released a new message \(en français\)](#) with the few details about the Fall 2020 competition dates that can be confirmed at this time.
- CIHR plans to complete the full Spring 2020 competition process before the Fall 2020 Project Grant competition begins (the competition timelines will not overlap). This means that investigators will receive the results of the Spring competition in time to consider peer review feedback and resubmit their application to the Fall Project Grant competition.
- CIHR is also looking at making modifications to the eligibility of Indigenous health researchers.
- The anticipated Fall 2020 Competition timelines are:
 - Registration deadline: mid-September
 - Application deadline: mid-October
 - Release Notice of Recommendation: February 2021
 - Release of Notice of Decision: Early March 2021
 - Funding Start Date: April 1st, 2021
- CIHR is looking carefully at how researchers will be able to describe the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on their productivity within their application. This would include reviewing the eligibility period of Early Career Researchers (ECR) for the Project Grant competition, and making it mandatory for applicants to attach the full review when they are responding to a previous review.
- Additional details will be available when the funding opportunity is launched in late July.

Strategic Funding Opportunity

- In early April, CIHR [announced \(en français\)](#) a three-month pause on existing and new strategic funding opportunities (FO), with the exception of FOs related to COVID-19, in order to allow us to focus our efforts on supporting the Government of Canada's response to the pandemic.
- On [June 23 \(en français\)](#), CIHR provided the community an update on the delay of strategic FOs. CIHR is consulting carefully with Scientific Directors and funding partners, to determine a time frame for these strategic FOs to move forward.
- All strategic FOs will remain available on ResearchNet, including all applications that were in progress and submitted, but with a new placeholder date of December 31, 2021.
- FOs with application deadlines that have closed, but which have not been peer reviewed, will not be re-opened to accept additional applications. Timelines will be confirmed to finalize these competitions.
- As competition timelines are confirmed, applicants will be provided with at least two months' advance notice to allow them to prepare their applications. Applicants will be able to:

- work on a previously started application(s);
- review and edit their previously submitted application(s) prior to resubmitting;
- withdraw their previously submitted application(s); and
- start a new application(s).
- FOs that do not have a placeholder date of December 31, 2021 will move forward according to posted timelines. New FOs will also be launched (e.g., the Fall 2020 Project Grant competition).
- A working group of Scientific Directors is currently prioritizing all Strategic FOs that have been approved internally to be able to go forward. The principles that assist with this prioritization exercise as well as the outcomes will be communicated to the community shortly.
- To summarize, currently only Project Grant competitions, as well as COVID-19, partner-led, Tri-Agency FOs and open awards programs are moving forward according to posted timelines.

Observer Program

- CIHR reinstated the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition with revised timelines to adjudicate the competition over the summer using video conference panels. As a result, and due to CIHR's current context, the focus is on the delivery of the peer review process for this competition. Unfortunately, this means that CIHR will not be offering the Observer Program this summer.
- This was a difficult decision as this program is highly valued by CIHR and the research community. It is CIHR's intention to offer the program as part of the Fall 2020 competition and details will be available shortly.
- Applications that were submitted to the Observer Program for the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition will be transferred to the Fall 2020 Project Grant competition.

New Frontiers in Research Fund Exploration 2020 – Launch

- The 2020 Exploration stream competition of the New Frontiers in Research Fund (NFRF) was launched June 24.
- This year, the competition has only 2 stages:
 - Notification of Intent to Apply (NOI) stage with a deadline of August 18, 2020 (at 8 p.m. Eastern Time)
 - Full Application stage with a deadline of October 20, 2020 (at 8 p.m. Eastern Time)
- Applications at each stage must be submitted by the research grant offices (RGOs). RGOs are free to set their own internal deadlines.
- For more information, please contact: NFRF-FNFR@chairs-chaire.gc.ca.

Update on Indirect Support for Students, Trainees and Research Support Personnel

- On June 30, the Tri-Agencies shared [additional details \(en français\)](#) on supplements for students, trainees and research support personnel funded through Tri-Agency research grants.
- RGOs will be contacted in the coming weeks to be made aware of which grants will be considered for the supplement. Once the supplements have been approved, they will also receive confirmation of payments
- Eligible grant holders will be contacted directly by email in the coming weeks for each eligible grant that they hold. For each grant, they will need to confirm that the research and work of trainees and research support personnel was disrupted by COVID-19 from April 1 to June 30, 2020, and that the grant was used to pay the salaries and stipends of trainees and research support personnel during this period of disruption.
- For more details on the supports for trainees paid indirectly through grants, please consult the CIHR website: <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/51992.html> ([en français](#)).

Additional Updates that were not covered during the meeting

Canada Research Continuity Emergency Fund

- The [Canada Research Continuity Emergency Fund website](#) has been launched to fulfill the Prime Minister's \$450M commitment to help the research enterprise affected by COVID-19.
- The Canada Research Continuity Emergency Fund (CRCEF) was announced on May 15, 2020 ([en français](#)), as part of the Government of Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan. The temporary program has been

established to help sustain the research enterprise at Canadian universities and health research institutions that have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- CRCEF is a Tri-Agency program that is administered by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) on behalf of the three federal research funding agencies: the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).
- The program will be delivered in three funding stages. Institutions must apply at each stage to access funding.
- The first two stages will exclusively provide wage support for eligible research personnel. The third stage will support incurred costs associated with maintenance and ramp-up of research activities. For all stages, the demonstration of need to access the emergency funds will be required.
- Only eligible institutions that confirm the need for emergency funds will have access to funding from the program.
 - Universities eligible for the Research Support Fund (RSF) are eligible to apply to CRCEF directly. Health research institutions will receive funding through the universities with which they are affiliated.
 - Non-affiliated health research institutions that are already eligible for agency funding will be eligible to apply directly to the program. CIHR's list of eligible health institutions will be used to identify non-affiliated health institutions that could potentially apply to the program. A public call will be put in place no later than July 10 to ensure these additional institutions can access the program.
- For Stage 1 (\$225 million), universities and health research institutions were required to apply by July 7 for wage support to help retain research personnel.
- Additional information on Stage 2 (up to \$100 million) and Stage 3 (\$125 million) will shortly be made available.
- Payments will be issued through a grant to recipients in up to three installments, to align with the three funding stages:
 - the first installment for wage support in Stage 1;
 - the second installment based on wage support supplemental needs, in Stage 2; and
 - the third installment for direct costs associated with maintenance and ramp-up of research activities, in Stage 3.
 - Those applying directly in Stage 2 will receive two installments.
- A SSHRC representative will provide additional information on the program and answer questions at an upcoming UD meeting.
- In the meantime, if you have questions about the application process, contact crcef-fucrc@chairs-chaire.gc.ca.

TGMS External Change Agent Network Recruitment

- The Tri-Agency Grants Management Solution (TGMS) team is informing the UD Network of this recruitment process because they value their contributions to the success of TGMS and would like them to work with their Vice-President of Research to suggest an External Change Agent Network member.
- In accordance with the stakeholder engagement principles (inform, consult, co-design and empower) for the [Tri-agency grants management solution \(TGMS\) initiative \(en français\)](#), the TGMS team would like to establish an External Change Agent Network (ECAN) comprised of representatives from all tri-agency eligible institutions.
- ECAN members will:
 - Provide an ongoing bidirectional channel of communication and engagement between your institution and TGMS.
 - Ensure effective and consistent communication by keeping their respective institutions updated on the ongoing progress of TGMS activities.
 - Provide input concerning development, implementation, communications and training.
 - Advise TGMS by identifying issues and challenges, and highlighting opportunities to add value.
 - Help identify and facilitate access to resources needed by various groups, knowing where to go for help.
- Who TGMS is looking for:
 - Representative should be a primary user of the current systems who will be able to engage members from across your institution. (This is likely someone from within your research grants office.)

- To ensure that the network effectively represents the experiences of a diverse group of users, institutions are expected to consider a diverse pool of potential individuals, including members of the four designated groups (women, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities and racialized minorities), when selecting a representative.
- Time commitment:
 - The network meetings will typically be conducted every six months for one hour, starting in August or September. There will also be regular updates sent by email. More information on the network, including the responsibilities of the members, can be found in the Terms of Reference that will be sent out with the minutes.
- Membership:
 - TGMS currently has representatives from the U15 plus the University of Winnipeg, Royal Roads University, UNBC, Memorial, St. Mary's and Lakehead.
 - The goal is to have a representative from each Tri-Agency eligible institution in Canada.
- The deadline for institutions to submit the name of their representative for ECAN is July 31st.
- If you have any questions, please email the TGMS Inbox at tgms-sgsto@cihr-irsc.gc.ca.

Questions from members:

- When will the peer review meetings take place for the Fall 2020 Project Grant competition?
 - CIHR explained that the review meetings are currently planned for mid-January to mid-February 2021. More specifically, CIHR is currently looking to schedule meetings from January 18 to February 5, 2021, however, this timeline is not finalized.
- I am concerned with the timeframe of the peer review meetings since it overlaps with the Human Frontiers Panel meetings.
 - CIHR is currently working with SSHRC and NSERC to avoid conflicting deadlines as much as possible.
- Would COVID-19-related applications be excluded, considered separately, or considered normally in the Fall 2020 Project Grant competition?
 - CIHR explained that since the Project Grant competition is an open competition, COVID-19 applications will be accepted. COVID-19 applications will not be prioritized or excluded in the Fall 2020 Project Grant competition. CIHR will consider whether COVID-19 applications submitted to the Fall 2020 Project Grant competition should be reviewed within the existing panel structure or if they should be reviewed in a new COVID-19 specific panel.
- How is CIHR accounting for the influx of Foundation Grant holders? Will there be more funding provided for the Spring 2021 Project Grant competition?
 - The budget for a Project Grant competition is \$275 million. The budget of the Foundation Grant competition was \$100 million. The funds from this budget will be divided into the Project Grant competition over a few years. CIHR is exploring if additional funds from the Foundation Grant competition should be allocated to the Spring 2021 Project Grant competition.
- Does CIHR have an update on the timeline of the supplemental pandemic funding for Tri-Agency funded Principal Investigators?
 - CIHR confirmed that award holders will need to attest that their research was disrupted by COVID-19 constraints and that they are not benefiting from compensation under the Canada Emergency Student Benefit, the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, or other income supports related to COVID-19. An email will be distributed the week of July 27th 2020 to institutions who currently have CIHR active grants. The email will include an attestation form that will need to be returned for individuals to be considered. CIHR explained that the amount of money provided will be calculated based on a 3-month average of the active grant amount.
- What happens if some trainees received other forms of income support and some trainees did not receive any?
 - CIHR confirmed that institutions can apply as long as some trainees are eligible and would benefit from this support.

- Can you confirm if the upcoming financial support to recover some expenses during the COVID-19 shut down (e.g. salaries) will include all forms of CIHR ongoing funds including Team Grants and CIHR Canada Research Chairs (CRC)? Or is this support limited to the Project Grant?
 - CIHR confirmed that support for students, trainees and research support personnel through CIHR research grants will not be limited to Project Grants. CIHR explained that most active grants should be included, with some exceptions. CIHR is currently finalizing the list of eligible programs and will share the list with members.
- Are Canadian Research Chair (CRC) holders eligible for the “indirect support package”?
 - **Update:** The main objective of the Support Package is to provide additional funding to research grant holders so that they can continue to support students, trainees and research support personnel during the crisis. CRC’s main objective is to directly support the salary of Research Chair recipients. Since the CRC holders do not support personnel and their salaries are secured, they would not be eligible for the indirect support package. On the other hand, if a researcher also happens to hold an agency grant (or several grants), they would be included to support their team members for those respective grants.

2. Adjournment

- The meeting ended at 13:30. The next meeting of the University Delegates will be on August 6th, 2020.