

**University Delegates Meeting
September 3, 2020 - 12:30-1:30 pm EDT
Minutes**

Chair: Adrian Mota, Associate Vice President, Research Programs

1. CIHR Updates

Spring 2020 Project Grant Competition

- CIHR staff are in the process of compiling lessons learned and will be analyzing feedback collected through the post-committee meeting survey and from discussions with the Chairs and Scientific Officers (SOs). Additional information will be shared with the UD Network at a future meeting.
- Two sessions were held this week with Chairs and SOs who participated in the competition review process. These sessions consisted of an informal discussion to collect feedback following the remote peer review meetings.
- The Notice of Recommendations (NOR) were sent on September 1, 2020.
- The Notice of Decision (NOD) will be released on September 15, 2020.

Fall 2020 Project Grant competition

Changes to the competition

- Following the UD meeting in August, the funding opportunity has been posted. As discussed during the last meeting, a few changes have been made to reflect the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as to address feedback previously received from applicants and reviewers.
- **Timelines:** CIHR adjusted the timelines for the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 Project Grant competitions. This decision was made to ensure that a gap continues to exist between when applicants receive their results from the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition and the registration and application deadlines for the Fall 2020 competition, and between the results of the Fall 2020 competition and the application deadline for the Spring 2021 competition. This gap will allow researchers to take stock of reviewers' comments if they choose to resubmit unsuccessful applications to the following competition.

| Fall 2020 Project Grant Competition timelines | Anticipated timelines for the Spring 2021 Project Grant |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registration deadline: September 16, 2020 • Application deadline: October 14, 2020 • Notice of Recommendation: February 16, 2021 • Anticipated Notice of Decision Date: March 3, 2021 • Funding Start Date: April 1, 2021 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registration deadline: March 4, 2021 • Application deadline: April 1, 2021 • Anticipated Notice of Decision Date: July 22, 2021 • Funding Start Date: October 1, 2021 |

- **Eligibility:** CIHR is committed to contributing to build a healthier future for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, and one way to do this is by increasing Indigenous health research capacity. Following consultations with representatives of Indigenous communities, and in the spirit of being more inclusive, CIHR has updated the eligibility criteria for the Project Grant competition. Starting with the Fall 2020 competition, individuals affiliated with Indigenous non-governmental organizations in Canada with a research or knowledge translation mandate will be eligible to apply to the Project Grant competition as Nominated Principle Applicants (NPA). Furthermore, Canadian NGOs with a research or knowledge translation mandate will also be eligible to apply to the Project Grant competition as NPAs. Our Contact Centre staff will be available to help these applicants create a ResearchNet account, register for a CIHR PIN, and navigate the application process more generally, as required.

- **Early Career Researchers (ECRs):** CIHR is providing a temporarily adjustments to the period of eligibility for an ECR. All those who held ECR status as of March 1, 2020, or who secured their first academic appointment after this date, will have their status extended by one year. CIHR will closely monitor the pandemic and its impact on ECRs overall and on specific groups with the intent that further interventions may be warranted.
- **COVID Impact Statement:** Applicants to the Fall 2020 Project Grant competition will have the option of completing an additional page in their application to highlight how COVID-19 has impacted their work (e.g. impact on productivity). It will also be important that any potential impact on the feasibility of research to be undertaken is addressed within the research proposal. CIHR will create guidelines for reviewers when considering the impacts and delays caused by COVID-19.
- **Response to Previous Reviews:** Going forward, applicants who choose to respond to previous reviewer comments will be required to include all of the reviews they received on their previous application—not just a selection of the comments as has previously been the case. Note that applicants will not have to respond to all of the points raised—only those which are relevant to the revised application.

Fall 2020 Observer Program

- CIHR is pleased to offer an [Observer program for ECRs \(en français\)](#) for the upcoming Fall 2020 Project Grant competition. This program is designed as an opportunity for ECRs to observe peer review committee meetings and gain valuable insights on the review process.
- All eligible applicants to the Spring 2020 Observer Program were informed on July 6th, 2020 that their application was retained and transitioned to the Fall 2020 Observer Program. Spring applicants do not need to re-apply.
- If you have questions about the eligibility of your Spring 2020 application, please contact CIHR's Contact Centre: support-soutien@cihr-irsc.gc.ca.

Ask Me Anything Sessions

- CIHR is hosting three “Ask Me Anything” sessions the week of September 7th, 2020. The sessions were designed to answer questions researchers had about the Fall 2020 Project Grant competition.
- The information required to participate to the “Ask Me Anything” sessions were shared with UD members. A summary will be prepared and shared on CIHR's website: <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/45096.html#AMA-F20> (en français)

Questions from members:

- Were the NORs sent to institutions as well as applicants?
 - The NORs were not shared with institutions; however, the NOD will be.
 - A recommendation was made from a UD member to share the NORs with institutions going forward.
- A recommendation was made to consider extending the Fall 2020 Project Grant application deadline to October 16th to avoid a deadline right after the long Thanksgiving weekend.
- Concern was expressed with the COVID-19 feasibility being considered in the peer review process for the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition.
 - CIHR explained that peer review panel members were advised to not take into account impacts of COVID-19 on feasibility when reviewing applications. Applicants were encouraged to contact CIHR directly if the feasibility of their application was considered in the review of their application due to COVID-19.
- Why are panel members from the same institution as the applicant allowed to stay in the room and vote if they say they do not know the applicant?
 - CIHR explained that due to varying sizes of institutions, for large institutions it is possible that a conflict does not exist. CIHR relies on reviewers to declare their ability to participate based on CIHR's conflict of interest rules. It is a reviewer's responsibility to disclose any conflicts that exist.

2. Feedback from the Remote Peer Review Meetings

- CIHR thanked members once again for their support with the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition.
- CIHR invited a discussion to obtain UD members' feedback, based on their personal experience, in the remote peer review meetings as CIHR looks towards delivering remote peer review meetings for the Fall 2020 Project Grant competition.

Feedback and recommendations received from UD members

Interaction and engagement:

- A recommendation was made for CIHR's consideration that reviewers in conflict could wait together in the same breakout room, allowing an opportunity to interact in between reviews.
- A member raised that there was a lack of interaction between panelists, and considered this to be a disadvantage of the remote peer review format. It was explained that it is important for the community and for younger faculty to have the opportunity to network at peer review meetings.
- UD members felt that the participation level is higher when the peer review meetings are in-person.

Reviewing environment:

- A member stated that many reviewers would be willing to do virtual peer review meetings again in the pandemic context but not as a long-term solution.
- UD members recommended a hybrid model for the peer review meetings (e.g. one in-person meeting and one remote meeting every year).

Miscellaneous:

- A member emphasized that the remote peer review meetings are a welcome option for parents since it is difficult for many to travel.
- It was indicated that the Sex and Gender-Based Analysis section is still weak in the applications. A recommendation was made to consider a scoring method of pass or fail.

3. Postdoctoral Fellow (PDF) Reviewers for the Doctoral Research Award (DRA) Program

- PDFs will be invited to participate as reviewers in the DRA competition, allowing them to develop peer review skills through hands-on experience.
- As of October 2020, all applications submitted to the DRA competition will be reviewed entirely by CIHR-funded PDFs.
- There were two pilot studies conducted in 2016 and 2017, where PDFs had the opportunity to review applications.
- Based on the results of these two pilot studies, CIHR concluded that PDFs are proficient reviewers. PDFs who participated in the pilot studies found that it was a useful experience for them to review applications.
- This aligns with the [CIHR Strategic Action plan on Training \(en français\)](#) as well as the [College of Reviewer's Reviewer Pathway \(en français\)](#) since it ensures that CIHR is supporting the development of the next generation of researchers.
- This also allows CIHR to create a new pool of reviewers and reduce pressure on mid-career and senior-career researchers.

Questions from members:

- How will PDFs be invited to review? Will they be asked to complete a reviewer profile for expertise/ language?
 - CIHR confirmed that they will be inviting PDFs who are currently funded by CIHR. PDFs will be asked to complete a reviewer profile.
- Can you clarify if CIHR-funded PDFs include individuals holding a CIHR Fellowship as well as PDF who are funded by a CIHR grant? Will there be discipline-specific reviews?
 - CIHR confirmed that the eligibility includes only individuals who hold a CIHR Fellowship at this time.

- Since the focus of the review of Fellowship applications is on the training environment, assignment are not based on the area of research of the application. Applications will continue to be assigned to reviewers by cluster.
- Will reviewing for the DRA competitions be a condition for funding for CIHR Fellowship Award recipients?
 - CIHR confirmed that reviewing for the DRA competitions will not be a condition of funding.
- Recommendations were made by UD members to not limit this opportunity to only CIHR Fellowship recipients and that CIHR should consider implementing a recruitment strategy via department Chairs.

4. Questions and Answers

Questions from members:

- Can you provide an update on the Strategic Funding Opportunities?
 - CIHR explained that in early April, they [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 focus their efforts on supporting the Government of Canada's response to the pandemic.
 - Over the past months, a working group of Scientific Directors has been prioritizing all strategic FOs that have been approved internally to go forward. CIHR has since assessed the internal capacity to deliver these strategic FOs and confirmed that the dates of the strategic FOs in ResearchNet will be updated soon.
 - CIHR reminded members that there will be a timeframe of two months between the re-initiation of the strategic FOs and the application deadline to allow applicants to prepare and complete their application.
 - More information will be shared with the UDs when the new strategic FOs dates are available.
- Should the Principal Investigators inform CIHR if they decide to withdraw their Project Grant registration after the formal NOD on September 15th ?
 - CIHR explained that they are encouraging applicants to begin the preparation of the registration ahead of the NOD.
 - CIHR confirmed that applicants should contact CIHR directly if they are already registered and decide not to proceed once the NODs are released.
- Can you clarify what the intent is of including Indigenous non-governmental institutions as applicants?
 - CIHR explained that the intention is to remove barriers and to allow individuals and organizations affiliated with Indigenous non-governmental organization to apply to the Project Grant competition as a Nominated Principal Investigator.
 - CIHR suggesting making a presenting on this topic at an upcoming UD meeting.

5. Adjournment

- The meeting ended at 13:30. The next meeting of the University Delegates Network will be held on October 1st, 2020.