

3rd University Delegates Executive Committee Meeting

November 5 - 6, 2019

160 Elgin Street, Ottawa, Ontario

Meeting Minutes

Participants:

Chair: Pierre Côté, Director General, Operations Support

Members: Dr. Brian Christie University of Victoria, Dr. Christian Beaulieu University of Alberta, Dr. David Rose University of Waterloo, Dr. Deborah Zornes, Royal Roads University, Dr. Jennifer McGrath, Concordia University, Dr. Lara Boyd University of British Columbia, Dr. Marilyn J. Hodgins University of New Brunswick, Dr. Vicki Kristman Lakehead University

Staff: Adrian Mota, Associate Vice-President, Research Programs; Annik Poirier, Manager, Business Solutions, Competition Management and Support; Alannah Brown, Senior Advisor, Research Programs; Michael Strong, President; Jeff Latimer, Head, Strategic Planning; Jennifer Robson, Strategic Coordination Officer, Program Design and Delivery; Kelly Taylor, Director General, Program Design and Delivery; Matthew Hogel, Senior Analyst; Caroline Boutin, Portfolio Manager, Tri-Agency Gateway Initiative; Bronte Paterson, Senior Business Analyst, Tri-Agency Gateway Initiative; Marina Dubois, Project Officer, Business Solutions, Competition Management and Support.

1. Introduction/Welcoming Remarks (Pierre Côté, Director General, Operations Support)

Chair welcomed participants to CIHR for the third UDEC in-person meeting. Deborah Zornes was introduced as the newest member to join the committee. This is her first meeting as the inaugural representative of the CARA/CIHR working group.

2. Updates and Inputs on Foundation Grant Program Sun-setting and Project Grant Program Evolution (Kelly Taylor, Director General, Program Design and Delivery)

Members provided feedback and recommendations on the sunsetting of the Foundation Grant Program, and on the evolution of the Project Grant Program to address challenges such as application pressure and success rates.

2.1 Support the transition of Foundation grantees into the Project Grant program:

Members discussed possible mechanisms for supporting and managing funding allocation based on grant size (i.e. small and large). Consideration was given to options such as the introduction of:

- Committee-specific budgets to fund additional smaller grants;
- Two separate funding streams for smaller and larger grants;
- Incentives for the submission of smaller grants, to aid with budget distribution and to increase success rates.

The benefits of maintaining one funding stream (status quo) were also discussed.

Suggestions for managing the transition based on the identification of Foundation grantees within the competition process included:

- Identifying to the Chair of committees, the candidates that are past Foundation grantees, to monitor for potential biases through the peer review process.
 - The members recommended that any “special efforts” for incoming (to the Project Grant Competition) of former Foundation Grantees should be avoided as this is more likely to lead to other unconscious bias or challenges.

While members discussed the impact of allowing Foundation grantees, transitioning into Project Grant, an additional half-page within their application to contextualize accomplishments from the Foundation Grant, they agreed that no special accommodations should be given in order to avoid unconscious bias.

Members emphasized the importance of CIHR setting clear expectations for the research community when managing the transition. Ideas include asking Project Chairs and Scientific Officers (SO) to share cautionary messaging/notes with the peer review committees, and engaging Chairs and SOs in conversations with CIHR on the way forward.

Finally, the committee discussed their strong preference for reinstating a mandatory Summary of Progress (previously used in the Open Operating Grant Program) for all applicants to summarize previous work relevant to their application. This would allow Foundation grantees to also contextualize their work and summarize their progress to date.

2.2 Review of Project Grant peer review committee mandates:

Acknowledging the low application pressure reported for the Project Grant program in the most recent competition, members discussed the importance of taking a broader approach to the review of peer review committee mandates. This includes:

- Maintaining some stability within the committees while supporting the continued evolution of the committee mandates. Revisions should focus on committees with known overlap, recognizing the challenges with ensuring that applications received for/reviewed by these committees are a good fit;
- Ensuring that applicants are responsible for initiating the process for submitting/transferring their applications to a specific peer review committee, as needed.
- The members expressed some interest in taking on a role in this broader approach to the evolution of the committee mandates.

2.3 Attachments:

As part of critical discussions on the subject of fairness in funding-related processes and requirements, members shared their perspectives regarding application requirements and the ongoing issue of mandatory versus optional attachments. While consensus on this important topic could not be reached and will necessitate broader engagement with the research community for collective input on the matter, members recommended that CIHR revisit its attachments guidelines and implement either an optional or a mandatory requirement – with the caveat that limitations would need to be established for the latter.

Regardless of the approach taken, members also highlighted the importance of educating the community on the use and review of attachments at the application and peer review stages respectively.

Finally, it was recommended that “Attachments” be renamed as “Supplementary Materials” within the application.

2.4 Supporting research excellence:

Members discussed mechanisms for continuing to support research excellence:

- Having more guidelines for ranking applications, to help better define expectations from reviewers;
- Adding more structured criteria;
- Supporting applicants to better address Sex and Gender-Based Analysis (SGBA) considerations in their applications, to support their merit at peer review. It was recognized that CIHR has a responsibility in ensuring that committee members are educated on the importance of SGBA considerations in peer review;

3. Distribution of CIHR Grants, Awards, and Dollars – By Institution Size and Geographic Location (Pierre Côté, Director General, Operations Support; Matthew Hogel, Senior Analyst, Operations Support)

Members discussed the distribution of CIHR resources, using program-based funding data prepared by CIHR. Data on the distribution of funds, based on institution size and geographical location was presented. Members acknowledged that:

- The success rate is comparable for U15 and non-U15 institutions;
- Success rates are proportionately balanced between provinces (with the exception of applications from Quebec in non-regulated award competitions);

Members recommended that more data be published on the research that CIHR is funding for the research community.

4. French Language Applications and Official Languages Action Plan (Pierre Côté, Director General, Operations Support)

Members discussed CIHR initiatives supporting the Official Languages Action Plan.

4.1 Elimination of bias in peer review of French applications:

Members brought recommendations for how best to support the implementation of recommendations made by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (OCOL):

- Members agreed that peer reviewers should be invited to write/submit comments in the language of their choice, with an option for CIHR to translate comments in the language of the applicants choice;
- Members discussed options for assessing language proficiency of candidate reviewers, including mechanisms such as pre-peer review testing or in-meeting assessment. The role of the College of Reviewers in making sure that French reviewers are assigned to relevant applications was also discussed;
- Members emphasized the importance of having an effective communication strategy to promote bilingualism in peer review and to encourage French researchers to submit applications in their preferred language.

4.2 Additional space for applications written in French:

Recent change to the Project Grant program to allow a 20% space increase to the research proposal of French applications was discussed. Members agreed that this increase should be applied across all CIHR programs/competitions. Since mechanisms to assess compliance with this increase remain to be identified, members recommended that CIHR put their trust in the community for now – bringing about

changes to the process if deemed required based on an evaluation of the process after a few competitions.

5. Update on the Strategic Plan (Jeff Latimer, Head, Strategic Plan)

Members engaged with CIHR on progress and next steps for the CIHR Strategic Plan. CIHR is pleased with the input received to date on activities related to the strategic planning exercise.

The National Health Research Summit will be held in December 2019. CIHR will increase the number of invitations to researchers and scientists with expertise in relevant priority areas. Invitations to the Summit are forthcoming, with representation from small, medium and large institutions. David Rose (University of Waterloo) will be representing the UD network at this meeting.

6. Tri-Agency Grants Management Solution (TGMS) Initiative Update (Caroline Boutin, Portfolio Manager, Tri-Agency Gateway Initiative; Bronte Paterson, Senior Business Analyst, Tri-Agency Gateway Initiative)

Members provided feedback on progress made to date for the TGMS initiative and more specifically, on the journey map for applicants. Feedback was provided to address/validate pain points pertaining to the application process that was informed by consultations with other external stakeholders over the last few months. Members emphasized the importance of mapping post-application processes, including extension requests and open access publications.

7. Open Discussion and Session with Dr. Michael Strong, President

Members engaged in an open conversation with CIHR senior management and Dr. Michael Strong to elaborate on topics already discussed at the meeting and/or additional matters of key interest.

- The President sought advice from members on the information flow within Universities. Members discussed opportunities for CIHR to increase community engagement on the Strategic Plan, including leveraging peer review committee discussions on relevant strategic areas.
- Members discussed possible means for improving peer review processes and promoting funding excellence and fairness across research area, budget, etc. Suggestions included the expansion of expertise within peer review committees.