



Order of Events at CIHR

1. Selection of potential peer review committee (PRC) members begins (chairs, scientific officers [SOs] and reviewers).
2. Registration deadline.
3. CIHR, the PRC chair and the two SOs refine the selection of PRC members who will review the committee's Project grants. One goal is to ensure that each committee has enough qualified reviewers with appropriate subject matter expertise to cover anticipated applications, based on the information supplied by registrants.

Information provided by registrants includes: summary, key words, areas of science, methods/approaches, study populations/experimental systems, and suggestion and justification (new for Spring 2018) of the most relevant PRC.

The key words are essential in assigning applications for review by the most appropriate PRC. It is helpful to CIHR, the PRC chairs and SOs when applicants include key words that convey the health issue, the approach/research/method, and type of data analysis. Key words covering this breadth of information are not always supplied by applicants.

4. Full application deadline.
5. CIHR, the PRC chair and the SOs complete PRC member selection. PRC membership may change to accommodate shifts in the nature of the applications.
6. Transfer period. CIHR, the PRC chairs and SOs work to ensure that applications will be reviewed by the most appropriate PRC. They really do try to keep applications in the requested PRC. Thought and care is taken behind the scenes when the possibility or need arises to transfer an application to a PRC that was not suggested by the applicant. Major considerations are to correlate the application with the PRC mandate and the available expertise on the PRC. The pool of expertise is not constant across competitions—it can change if PRC members submit their own application or cannot attend one competition review. Applications that can be considered under several PRCs may go to a PRC where there is currently a high level of expertise by at least 2 reviewers.

Strategies for Applicants in Selecting a PRC

Scenario # 1. Your grant will partly require 'non-traditional' reviewer expertise. Use the justification section for PRC selection in your Project registration to alert the chair and SOs that you need non-traditional reviewer expertise. For example, your justification might encourage the PRC to recruit a reviewer who is a champion of a new technology that you will use (to complement reviewers who know the core topic but are unfamiliar with the new technology).

Scenario # 2. Your grant covers research areas under the mandate of more than one PRC. For example, you propose three basic science aims and a drug screen. Consider that members of a basic science PRC might not feel comfortable reviewing your grant because of the drug screen, and that members of a pharmacology-oriented PRC might not feel comfortable reviewing your grant because of the basic science component. Based on your careful consideration of PRC mandates,¹ past

¹ CIHR [Project Peer Review Mandates](#). These have not been revised from the Fall 2017 Project competition, but are anticipated to be updated before the Fall 2018 Project competition.



membership of PRCs,² and applications funded by the committee,³ you select your PRC preference. Then, in your summary, minimize information that might lead the chair or an SO of your preferred PRC to think that your grant is not a good fit. For example, to make the application in scenario # 2 more palatable to a basic science panel you might make the drug screen a sub-aim.

Preparing the Summary

Many of the comments from researchers who reviewed for the Fall 2017 Project competition were around applications being rewarded for novelty or reflecting innovation. Your summary must raise interest in these areas and put the reviewer in a positive frame of mind to read further. One strategy may be to finalize your summary last. After completing all the other sections, you may be more able to really synthesize all of the grant into this one page—knowing what is important to emphasize, and putting forward clear key messages about the intent, the design, the data analysis plan, and the significance of your proposed research.

PRC feedback has clearly suggested that the applicant must explain what this project or series of projects will contribute to the body of knowledge or health outcomes. Committees are looking for "real," achievable and explicit outcomes. A statement in the summary about this can positively influence the whole PRC discussion, and can negatively influence that discussion if stated outcomes are inflated or vague.

Additional Suggestions

At least some members of the research team (PI and Co-I included) should complete the [online learning modules](#) offered by the CIHR Institute of Gender & Health. CIHR is getting more serious, and their policies more explicit, about addressing sex and/or gender factors in the entire application and proposed research process in a meaningful and appropriate fashion. Spring 2018 reviewers will complete written comments about the degree to which sex and/or gender was addressed in an application. Knowledge about how to incorporate sex and gender factors will be expected.

Contributors

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Feedback?

If you reviewed for the Fall 2017 Project Competition and would like to share your thoughts or have suggestions for this or another resource, please contact Joanne Simala-Grant at js24@ualberta.ca

² Fall 2017 Project Peer Review committee [membership lists](#) will not be available until March 23, 2018. The Fall 2016 Project competition did not use panels. The Open Operating Grant Program panel membership is available.

³ Search the [Funding Decisions Database](#) and filter by PRC.