

CIHR Foundation Mock Stage 2 Application Discussion

Notes – Comments from Participants

Dec 10, 2014 2:00 – 3:30 pm

JSG = Comments attributed to Joanne Simala-Grant, Director, Grant Assist Program (Health Sciences)

Comments/Introduction from JSG:

- Provided an introduction and went over the [intro slides](#) giving an overview of the 5 sections.
- Highlighted the reviewer adjudication scale and suggested focussing on the description of “Outstanding” when preparing the Stage 2 application (“excels in most or all relevant aspects, any shortcomings are minimal”).
- CIHR indicated the Foundation competition Stage 1 standard deviation was the same as previously observed for the OOGP.

Comments about the Summary (JSG):

- The Summary is not scored however is important because
 - o it creates a first impression of reviewers at both Stages 2 and 3,
 - o will be used by Stage 2 reviewers during final ranking
 - o it will be used to match the application to content expert reviewers at Stage 2.
- Note that Stage 3 reviewers are unlikely to have expertise in the applicant’s subject area, thus the summary so needs to be written in a way that is understandable by the non-expert reviewer. There needs to be a balance of scientific writing that is appealing to an expert reviewer but is also understandable by a non-expert reviewer. However, the summary is not to be written using lay language.
- Maybe an individual outside of the applicant’s theme could read the Summary to see if they understand it and find it compelling. This individual may be similar to the type of reviewers using during the Stage 3 interdisciplinary review.
- The summary, if the application is funded, will also be posted on the CIHR decision database.

Comments from discussants about the Summary:

- There has been no history of this type/format of summary before.
- Reviewers and applicants are learning how to look at this type of summary (and whole application) at the same time.
- It was suggested that the Summary was intended to be a “mini-version” of the entire research proposal. If written in this way, it would be awkward as you would end on a summary of the “Support Environment.”
- The group felt the summary needed to be written using key words for a field so the application would go to the correct expert reviewers.

Question: In the mock stage proposals, the headings match the reviewer guideline bullets in wording (mimicked CIHR wording using “goal” and “objectives” and “impact”) and order. Does the group feel this is helpful?

Answer from

discussants: Yes, it is helpful to have the headings match the bullet points in wording and in order. This increases structure and flow for the reviewer.

Question: In the theme 1 mock stage 2 application, did the discussants feel the summary came across as “bragging”?

Answer from discussants: Coming across as arrogant was also a concern at Stage 1 but reviewers seemed to respond positively to it. From the perspective of a Stage 1 reviewer, they were expecting for applicants to have strong statements about their accomplishments so there was no concern.

Question: Did the group feel the theme 1 summary was difficult to read?

Answer from discussants: Yes, some felt it was.

Comments about the Research Concept (JSG):

- Felt that the theme 1 mock application Research Concept covered most points.
- It is difficult across all themes to convey impact. In theme 1 it can be difficult to sound convincing while in theme 2, 3, and 4 impact or outcome may be more obvious but it difficult to tangibly demonstrate.
- Conceptual Coherence: the objectives should be linked and should assist the applicant in meeting the research goal.

Comments from discussants about the Research Concept:

- Felt that the Research Concept had some aspects of the introduction/background section found in OOGP applications, but more broad and high level with less detail.

Question from

discussants: With the Stage 1 application, there was uncertainty about what applicants should provide in terms of “program.” Were applicants to describe a large, overarching program that spans theme 1-4 and engages experts from many disciplines? This would cost a lot of money. Or, are they looking for a more focused program?

Answer: Applicants are mostly describing what they already have funding for and framing their research as a program. As a reviewer, they realize if more “grand” programs are funded, others will not get funding. There needs to be a central research thrust that runs through the objectives. It was suggested to applicants from another discussant to look at NSERC Discovery grants as they have a section on program of research.

Comments about the Research Approach (JSG):

- Reiterated that in the mock applications, they tried to address each reviewer guideline bullet point in the criteria.
- The Research Approach is only 1.5 pages, so it is difficult to get a strong sense of the approach.

Comments from discussants about the Research Approach:

- It is difficult to articulate a 7 year program in 1.5 pages. The group felt that more specific detail could be provided in the earlier years and flexibly and addressing pitfalls could be discussed.
- The group felt this section was more about “program” versus “methodology” and it was important to communicate how the program would flow.

Comments about the Expertise (JSG):

- Although the mock applications did not, applicants could quantitate an individual's involvement if there is no history of working with them before. Could state "x hours/week" similar to how involvement was quantified in OOGP applications.
- Experts are to be named under participants section.
- Experts cannot append letters. Letters can only be attached if offering in-kind supports. Then applicant could have a letter attached in the budget section that could provide more details to the activities they will be engaging in.

Comments from discussants about the Expertise:

- Felt that it was also important to show what experts contribute especially if they are contributing more than one technique or skill. The group also agreed that it would be good to quantify involvement.
- The group felt in the "Expertise" section, information about methodology could also be included.

Comments about Mentorship & Training (JSG):

- Felt that the sections in the mock stage 2 applications were good and clear.
- Felt that it was helpful to highlight past trainees.
- There are two opinions on what to include in this section:
 1. Personal training: lab meetings, one-on-one meetings
 2. Institutional supportSome felt that Institutional Support could risk coming across as generic (boiler plate) and would be discounted by reviewers.

Comments from discussants about the Mentorship & Training:

- The group felt that this section should state training philosophy and why it is important and how it will be implemented.
- Highlighting past trainees can show that the training strategy works and adds value to past history.
- It may be difficult for New Investigators to have many examples of successful trainees but could focus on their training philosophy.
- Discussants felt they could also talk about professional skills offered (communication at conferences, for example) in addition to methodology training.
- Could look to the FGSR and PDF site for professional development training opportunities.
- From a Clinician Scientist perspective, the group felt that it was important to include information about training in terms of professionalism, cultural sensitivity and ethics. These types of trainees may span all themes and several types of training levels so it is important for them to work together.

Comments about Quality of Support Environment (JSG):

- There is not a lot of space in this section.
- CIHR says not looking for new money from each institution however there is a worry that if some of the larger institutions do give money it will hold merit in the eyes of the reviewer.
- There is also a concern, however, that if money is given for example for a PDF salary then reviewers would cut the budget by that salary amount.
- In this section, perhaps it would be best to emphasize support from core facilities. For example, could state how much it would cost for outside faculty/university/department but the cost is reduced because a member of that faculty/university/department.

- Should think about writing about SPOR SUPPORT units as Alberta is quite ahead of other provinces. Could contact SPOR platform leads for specific wording as in the Alberta model, SPOR SUPPORT is tied to the different platforms.

Comments from discussants about the Quality of Support Environment:

- The group felt that it was important to emphasize what the grant would support and what the department/faculty/university would support in terms of dollars. This would help mitigate the risk of budget cuts.

Comments about the Budget (JSG)

- Applicants can now ask for equipment in the budget.
- CIHR states that it won't fund research that is funded outside of CIHR (ex. Heart and Stroke) however if the applicant ultimately needs to convince the reviewer that this is justified.
- CIHR has stated that they are anticipating no across the board cuts.
- The same reviewers that look at your Stage 2 application will look at your budget.
- The budget is very vague and basically based on past funding history.

Comments about Character Counts (JSG)

- Entering sections on ResearchNet:
 1. Carriage returns do not cost characters.
 2. Can increase the font size at no character cost.
 3. Can use rich formatting like bold, italics, underline, bullets, and numbering.

Comments about Figures (JSG)

- There is no limit to the number of figures but no framed text is allowed.
- Would be useful to have a gantt chart/timeline as a figure showing milestones and when experts will be engaged. Could also use to show decision points and where to go. This could speak to flexibility.

General Comments from discussants about the Application

- Some reviewers are looking closely at the criteria and checking that all points are addressed; they are taking the criteria at face value.
- It is worth noting that the bullet points of the adjudication criteria are at the top of the screen when the reviewer reads and scores each section.
- Discussants felt that a summary table of abbreviations of acronyms would be allowed in the figures.
- It was stated that reviewers may find it confusing if other sections are referenced in one section. Some reviewers prefer to read each section as "stand alone."