

# 2012 Career Investigator Competition For Scholars Awards EVALUATION PROCESS

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The purpose of peer-review is to ensure that Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research meets its mandate to support excellence by funding outstanding researchers, trainees and scientific research.

MSFHR relies on peer-review to ensure accountability, not only to the provincial government - the source of MSFHR funding – but to the research community at large. The MSFHR Programs Team, in consultation with the MSFHR Research Advisory Council (RAC) is responsible for managing and coordinating all aspects of the review process.

## Principles of Peer Review

There are three main principles of peer review:

### Confidentiality

All information contained in applications submitted to MSFHR, reports made by reviewers, and any discussions by the review panel about MSFHR funding programs or applications/applicants are strictly confidential and subject to BC Personal Information Act (PIPA). All reviewers are required to read and sign a MSFHR Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure Agreement prior to commencing the review.

By law, applicants have access to their own application files; therefore written documentation regarding the evaluation of an application is made available to the applicants when they are notified of MSFHR's decision. The identities of the reviewers are not revealed.

### Conflict of Interest

To guarantee the integrity of the review process, MSFHR makes every effort to ensure that its decisions are fair and objective, and are seen to be so. All MSFHR reviewers are required to observe the [Guidelines on Conflict of Interest \(PDF\)](#). All review panel members must read and agree to abide by the Conflict of Interest policy prior to viewing any application information.

## Parity

Parity refers to the willingness and ability of all review panel members to be fair and reasonable, to exercise meticulous scientific judgment; and to understand, and take into account the particular context of each application. A review will not be accepted as fair if it contains language that could be interpreted as sarcastic, contentious, arrogant or inappropriate in any way. On the other hand, a constructive review, which provides comments that point out deficiencies that could be addressed in a resubmission, help to assure an unsuccessful applicant that a fair assessment of their application was provided.

## Selection of Review Panels

MSFHR peer-review committees typically consist of a Chair, Scientific Officer, and panel members. Individual panel members are selected for their research excellence, as reflected by their ability to obtain continued peer-review funding, and for their breadth of knowledge and maturity of judgment. At the end of each competition, MSFHR staff commences the process of confirming continuing terms/search for potential panel members for the upcoming competition.

Career Investigator award panels are organized by the four CIHR research themes (biomedical, clinical, health services and population health).

Peer-review committee members are selected based on their quality as reviewers, expertise and excellence as researchers. MSFHR's Research Advisory Committee has the final authority for selecting reviewers. Potential members are identified and prioritized in consultation with many sources, including:

- Recommendations from the research community
- Nominations from the Board and Research Advisory Committee
- Applicants

Membership of the peer-review panels as a whole should:

- Cover the range of research areas that fall within the committee mandate
- Represent the health research theme appropriate to the committee mandate
- Minimize conflict of interest
- Allow for adequate local and regional representation
- Provide appropriate representation by gender

## Roles and Responsibilities

The **Programs Team** consist of MSFHR Programs staff that plan, coordinate, support, monitor and manage the funding programs. They support all review panel members conduct evaluation in accordance with MSFHR guidelines, evaluation criteria and business processes.

The **Chair** must be familiar with the objectives of the Career Investigator Program, fulfill an oversight role, and does not rate applications or vote during the review panel meeting. The Chair acts as a facilitator to establish a positive, constructive, fair-minded environment in which the applications are evaluated. Also, the Chair ensures the peer-review panel functions smoothly, effectively and objectively in accordance with MSFHR's policies and procedures.

The **Scientific Officer** supports the Chair in his/her role during the peer review panel meeting and does not rate applications or vote during the peer review panel meeting. The primary function is to take official notes of discussion for each application, which are sent to the applicants along with internal reviewer and external reader reviewer reports. The Scientific Officer also ensures that issues of ethics and other concerns are flagged for the attention of MSFHR Programs Team.

The **Panel Members** provide critical assessment of the application and constructive written feedback, participate in the rating applications, and vote during the peer review panel meeting. Each application is reviewed in depth by two lead reviewers.

The **External Readers** do not normally attend the peer-review panel meetings. They focus on their specific expertise and provide constructive feedback the research approach, originality of the program of research and the impact of the research. Panel Members refer to the external reader reports when preparing their reports.

## Prior to the Peer-Review Panel Meeting

After application deadline, panel members rank their level of knowledge and expertise against each of the eligible applications – conflict of interest, preferred, able and not able. Based upon this self-assignment, the Programs Team assigns two lead reviewers to each application.

The lead reviewers independently complete a thorough review, prepare written comments and assign an initial score for each application. At the same time, rest of the panel members familiarize themselves with all the applications, except for those applications they are in conflict with, to prepare for discussion at the review panel meeting.

## The Peer-Review Panel Meeting

Before the review of an application commences, panel member(s) in conflict with the application leave the room for the duration of the review panel's discussion of that application.

The two lead reviewers summarize the application's major strengths and weaknesses with their initial scores displayed to the rest of the review panel. The Chair leads the panel's discussion inviting participation from all members. The lead reviewers will be given the opportunity to revise their initial scores based on the panel's discussion. An agreement is reached between the lead reviewers to arrive at a consensus score. All panel members, including the lead reviewers, confidentially score each application within +/- 0.5 of the consensus score. The Chair and Scientific Officer does not normally score the applications, however, there are situations when they review and score an application(s) if

they have the expertise which other panel members do not have for a particular application(s). The final score assigned to an application is the average of the confidential scores of all panel members.

To ensure consistency, panel members use a common scale, ranging from 0 to 4.9 and are encouraged to use the full range of scores. If the overall score from both lead reviewers is below 3.5, there is limited discussion of the application.

The Programs Team produces a list of all the applications in ranked order. A ranked list, with the identity of the applicant masked, is presented to the review panel for a final review.

## **Funding Decisions**

The rating given to each application during peer-review is used to generate a rank ordered list of applications. MSFHR makes its funding decisions based on this list.

Applicants are notified of the outcome of the review process after completion of the review panel meetings and approval by the MSFHR Board. The success rate may vary from one competition to another, and depends on the quality of the applications received and the available program funds. There is no appeal process.

Funded and non-funded applicants receive notification detailing the funding decision, as well as the reviewer reports. A list of the successful applicants is published on the MSFHR website.

## **Continuous Process Improvement**

MSFHR is committed to continual improvement in the process of reviewing MSFHR programs. Panel members are asked to provide feedback/recommendations on policies and procedures pertaining to the monitoring, co-ordination and evaluation of the review processes of MSFHR's competitions. MSFHR Programs Team takes these recommendations to the MSFHR Research Advisory Council (RAC).