



## Revised MSFHR Networking Infrastructure Guidelines

### 1. PURPOSE OF THE REVISED MSFHR NETWORKING INFRASTRUCTURE GUIDELINES

With the inception of the Health of Population Networks and the Technology/Methodology Platforms, MSFHR has made a conscious move into a new realm of granting in order to transform the way research has traditionally been conducted in BC. Reviews of progress to date have shown that our initial granting guidelines need clarification in order to ensure that the goals of the Networking Program are met. MSFHR is committed to continuous learning and improvement and will continue to amend guidelines as required to achieve this end.

MSFHR expects awardees to adhere to Networking Program guidelines. In the event they are breached, MSFHR reserves the right to withhold award payments. When circumstances warrant it, MSFHR and/or a Network's/Platform's Oversight Committee may recommend an external review of a Network/Platform to develop recommendations for action, which may include termination of the Network/Platform's MSFHR funding award.

### 2. REVISED NETWORK INFRASTRUCTURE GUIDELINES

#### 2.1 Appointment of Leaders/Co-leaders

A strong leadership team is a critical factor for the successful development and sustainability of each Health of Population Network and Technology/Methodology Platform.

To that end, each Network/Platform is required to:

- develop and implement a Leadership Identification and Selection Process (see below for details);
- confirm that each Network/Platform Leader/Co-leader has been approved by the Network/Platform's Oversight Committee (see Section 2 - Governance and Accountability);
- submit a list of Leaders/Co-leaders to the MSFHR Board of Directors who will endorse that the process for nominating and electing the Leaders/Co-leaders has adhered to the Revised MSFHR Networking Infrastructure Guidelines;
- immediately notify MSFHR of any changes in leadership during the term of the award.

In developing a **Leadership Identification and Selection Process**, consideration should be given to the following.

- **Leadership Competency:** Ensuring that the Leaders/Co-leaders have leadership skills and competencies, including expertise in the Network/Platform area, credibility and good standing in the community, demonstrated experience in leadership roles, and management and operational skills to mobilize Network/Platform activities.
- **Leadership Commitment:** Ensuring that the Leaders/Co-leaders are able to give the necessary intellectual and time commitments required to effectively lead the Network/Platform.
- **Leadership Structure:** Ensuring that the Leaders/Co-leaders are able to establish and maintain a leadership structure that engages and reflects appropriate representation of leaders across the Network/Platform area and relevant stakeholder groups to support effective governance and operations.
- **Selection Process:** Ensuring that the selection process is clearly articulated and communicated to all relevant stakeholders, and includes predefined selection criteria, and nominating and voting procedures. Leaders/Co-leaders should be appointed for a fixed term of 12 months, with renewal dependent on the leader's willingness to continue, on-going evaluation of performance (see below), and approval by the Oversight Committee of the respective Network/Platform.
- **Transparency of Process:** Ensuring that the selection process is transparent and equitable, and a clear and effective process is in place to address and mitigate risks associated with stakeholder dissatisfaction and/or claims of bias.
- **On-Going Evaluation of Leadership:** Ensuring that mechanisms are in place to evaluate Leaders/Co-leaders on an annual basis, to determine if the Network/Platform objectives are being met.
- **Unsatisfactory Performance by a Leader/Co-leader:** Ensuring that a process is defined for circumstances where a Leader/Co-leader is not meeting the obligations and performance expectations of his/her role, or has acted unprofessionally or in ways that do not promote the best interests of the Network/Platform. The process should be the responsibility of the Oversight Committee, and allow for placing a Leader/Co-leader on probation or dismissing him/her. The Oversight Committee is required to notify MSFHR when such circumstances arise and such a process has been initiated.
- **Leader Succession:** Ensuring that the Network/Platform maintains effective leadership by developing succession plans, and having contingency plans in place for unexpected absences or resignations of Leaders/Co-leaders.

## 2.2 Governance and Accountability

Leaders/Co-leaders and governing bodies that are effective and credible are critical for the successful development and sustainability of each of the Health of Population Networks and Technology/Methodology Platforms. Their processes and decisions must be seen to be equitable and transparent.

To that end, recipients of MSFHR Networking Program Awards (Health of Population Networks, and Technology/Methodology Platforms) are required to:

- establish and maintain appropriate governance and accountability mechanisms including the establishment of an Oversight Committee to guide and support their operations; and
- identify a host institution. The host institution is most commonly a publicly-funded BC health research institution, university or health authority, responsible for administering award funds on behalf of the successful award recipient in accordance with MSFHR's guidelines and policies. The host institution cannot be a private and/or for-profit organization.

The Oversight Committee is required to provide to MSFHR:

- a list of Oversight Committee members;
- details of the nomination process for committee members;
- terms of reference for the committee, including operating and conflict of interest guidelines; and
- on an annual basis, a current list of committee members, and minutes of the committee meetings for the past year.

Other types of committees may also be established, such as advisory committees, reference groups, task forces and/or working groups. It is important to note that these entities perform different functions. For example, an oversight committee will have authority to determine the strategic directions of a Network/Platform, ensure that an effective team is in place to carry out day to day activities, account for financial and other resources, etc. By contrast, an advisory committee typically has no formal authority, but functions to make recommendations and/or provide key information and advice. A working group is usually an ad hoc group convened to undertake a specific task.

The Host Institution is required to provide to MSFHR:

- an annual financial statement for each MSFHR award, as per the Conditions of Award and other specifications defined by MSFHR;
- confirmation that all expenditures of MSFHR award funds are eligible expenses under the award (see Section 2.5); and
- written notification of known substantive changes that may affect the Network/Platform (including resignation/changes in Leaders and other key personnel, and major budget/expenditure variances).

In developing appropriate governance and accountability mechanisms, the following guidelines, specifying the responsibilities of Award Recipients, Oversight Committees, Host Institutions and MSFHR, are to be noted:

#### **A. Award Recipients**

Award Recipients (Leaders/Co-leaders of each Network/Platform) are directly responsible for:

- ensuring that the program of activity on which the funding award is based is implemented as described;

- ensuring that the necessary structures, processes and resources to support the program of activity are established and maintained;
- ensuring that internal and external governance and accountability mechanisms are established and maintained, which are effective, credible, equitable and transparent;
- ensuring that MSFHR award funds are expended and accounted for, as per the approved budget, and that all expenditures are eligible expenses under the award;
- notifying MSFHR of substantive changes being made that may affect the Network/Platform (including resignation/changes in leaders and other key personnel, and major budget/expenditure variances), and obtaining approval where appropriate;
- reporting to MSFHR, as required, on progress and outcomes;
- reporting to MSFHR, as required, on award funds; and
- meeting other duties and responsibilities as outlined in the MSFHR Conditions of Award, and as specified by MSFHR from time to time.

## **B. Oversight Committees**

Oversight Committees, with established and written terms of reference outlining how they are to function, are directly responsible for:<sup>1</sup>

- steering the Network/Platform towards its mission and guiding its strategic planning;
- approving the Leaders/Co-leaders of the Network/Platform, and regularly evaluating their performance;
- being transparent in their operations and decision-making, including communicating to members and other stakeholders;
- developing appropriate operating structures and processes;
- ensuring committee members understand their roles and avoid conflicts of interest;
- maintaining fiscal responsibility;
- ensuring that an effective management team is in place and overseeing its activities;
- implementing monitoring, evaluation and control systems;
- planning for the succession and diversity of the committee and Leaders/Co-leaders; and
- where circumstances warrant it, recommending to MSFHR termination of the Network/Platform's MSFHR funding award and dissolution of the Network/Platform.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from: Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector (1999). Building on Strength: Improving Governance and Accountability in Canada's Voluntary Sector, Final Report. <http://www.vsr-trsb.net/pagvs/index.htm>

Network/Platform Leaders/Co-leaders can attend meetings of the Oversight Committee but as observers only; they cannot be members of the committee, chair the meetings, or have voting rights.

MSFHR reserves the right to be represented as an ex-officio member of the Oversight Committee of each Network/Platform.

### **C. Host Institutions**

Host institutions receiving MSFHR Network/Platform award funds are directly responsible for:

- contributing reasonable institutional infrastructure and resources to support the program of activities that are complementary to, and not duplicative of those funded by the MSFHR award;
- ensuring that MSFHR award funds are expended and accounted for, including funds transferred to other institutions/individuals as a result of Network/Platform programs or to support related Network/Platform infrastructure costs in other regions of the province, as per the approved budget, and that all expenditures are eligible expenses under the award;
- notifying MSFHR of substantive changes that may affect the Network/Platform (including resignation/changes in leaders and other key personnel, and major budget/expenditure variances); and
- meeting other duties and responsibilities as outlined in the MSFHR Conditions of Award, and as specified by MSFHR from time to time.

### **D. MSFHR**

MSFHR is directly responsible for:

- providing written confirmation of the Network/Platform award to the Award Recipient and identified Host Institution, including Conditions of Award, the approved funding amount, and the approved Network/Platform budget, at the commencement of the award, and on a regular basis thereafter;
- specifying annual reporting responsibilities to the Award Recipient and identified Host Institution;
- monitoring and evaluating the progress and outcomes of each Network/Platform, including reviewing annual and other progress reports, initiating independent reviews of each Network/Platform, and providing feedback to Award Recipients and identified Host Institutions;
- identifying and responding to issues of concern in a timely fashion, and working with Award Recipients, the identified Host Institution, and if appropriate the Oversight Committee, to resolve them;
- working in partnership with Award Recipients and the identified Host Institution to support the sustainability of the Network/Platform, as appropriate.

MSFHR, in its sole discretion, can terminate the funding of a Network or Platform. The Oversight Committee of a Network or Platform can also recommend to MSFHR termination of an MSFHR funding award.

## 2.3 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Conflicts of Interest (COI), either perceived or actual, of persons affiliated with the Network/Platform in positions of influence, have the potential to cast doubt on those persons' credibility and effectiveness. Perceived or actual COI may also negatively impact on the success of the Network/Platform.

To that end, each Network/Platform is required to:

- develop and implement guidelines regarding COI.

COI include any circumstance where a person affiliated with the Network/Platform is in a position to influence, either directly or indirectly, Network/Platform business, research, or other decisions in ways that could result in an advantage or material gain to that person or a related party, and compromise the Network/Platform's interests, integrity or fundamental mission. Such persons include, but are not limited to, Leaders/Co-leaders, committee members, and other persons holding leadership or senior positions in the Network/Platform. COI may be real or perceived.<sup>2</sup>

In developing COI guidelines, each Network/Platform should strive to ensure that:

- COI are avoided wherever possible;
- perceived COI are minimized; and
- a mechanism is in place to deal with real or perceived COI.

COI procedures may include that:

- COI disclosure statements be completed upon appointment to positions of influence in the Network/Platform;
- annual updates of COI disclosure statements be completed;
- unforeseen COI that may arise in specific situations be disclosed in a timely and appropriate fashion; and
- persons with potential, actual or apparent COI excuse themselves from (i.e., abstain from) decisions or situations where such conflicts exist.

## 2.4 GRANTING ACTIVITIES

In a review of other provinces which have similar networking programs as those funded by MSFHR, the practice of secondary granting activities has been identified as presenting significant challenges for ensuring impartial, high-quality adjudication and evaluation processes, and for clearly demonstrating added value to the program (as distinct from the recipient of the award/grant). *MSFHR, therefore, discourages the use of MSFHR Networking Program award funds by its Award Recipients for secondary granting activities.*

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from: University of British Columbia (2006). Office of the University Council: Conflict of Interest, Policy s12.4. <http://www.universitycounsel.ubc.ca/coi/definitions.html#coi>; and Canadian Health Services Research Foundation (CHSRF, 2004). Conflict of Interest Policy. [http://www.chsrf.ca/about/do\\_conflict\\_interest\\_e.php](http://www.chsrf.ca/about/do_conflict_interest_e.php)

Nevertheless, recipients of MSFHR Networking Program Awards (Health of Population Networks, and Technology/Methodology Platforms) have been granted permission to issue secondary grants and/or awards, provided the following conditions are met.

- **Before** the granting and/or award program is initiated, the Network/Platform must justify and demonstrate to MSFHR how such grants and awards will contribute to the Network/Platform's goals and objectives.
- **With prior approval** by MSFHR, a Network/Platform may issue up to 20% of its MSFHR award funds in each year (including any carry forward MSFHR funds from the preceding year). This limit includes all grants and awards to individuals or groups (including but not limited to seed, pilot, developmental, travel, conference, scholarship, and training grants and awards).
- If the total value of grants and awards exceeds the annual maximum limit of 20%, MSFHR will deduct the excess amount from subsequent award instalments to the Network/Platform.
- A Network/Platform offering grants or awards valued at \$5,000 or more must develop and implement an **External Peer-review Process** to assess applications for such grants or awards.
- MSFHR award funds cannot be used for the purpose of matching funds for research operating grants and capital/equipment grants.
- A Network/Platform cannot offer grants or awards that parallel, or might be perceived to parallel, other MSFHR awards. Confirmation of the eligibility of all grant or award programs offered by a Network/Platform is to be sought from MSFHR **before** the program is initiated.
- Grants and/or awards cannot be used for the purpose of funding capital or equipment, or repairs/maintenance.
- Grants and/or awards issued by a Network/Platform must not be referred to by the Network/Platform or by the recipients as MSFHR grants or awards.

### ***Implementing External Peer-review Process***

In developing their processes to meet this condition, the Network/Platform must ensure the following:

- that the quality and merit of the funding proposals is independently evaluated by one or more persons with content expertise in the Network/Platform area but who are not affiliated with the Network/Platform. (Such persons may or may not reside in BC.);
- that the review process is conducted in an open and rigorous manner;
- that guidelines regarding conflicts of interest are developed for persons submitting funding proposals who are affiliated with the leadership, governance or operations of the Network/Platform. Such persons include Leaders/Co-leaders, committee members, and other people holding leadership or senior positions in the Network/Platform;

- that tracking and accountability processes are implemented to ensure grant and award funds were used for the purposes intended; and
- that research funded in whole or in part by a Network/Platform grant and/or award must have appropriate ethics approval where necessary before funding is released.

MSFHR reserves the right to end a granting activity at any time, and to request an external review or evaluation of the External Peer-review Process.

## 2.5 ELIGIBLE AND INELIGIBLE EXPENSES

MSFHR's Infrastructure Programs aim to help create a vibrant and sustainable health research environment that is recognized for excellence, is responsive to BC's health needs, and contributes to building BC's economy. The Networking Program is a key component of MSFHR's Infrastructure Programs, and comprises two types of funding awards: Health of Population Networks, and Technology/Methodology Platforms.

Both funding awards are intended to contribute to research infrastructure, that is, services and resources that enhance the research environment, increase productivity, build critical mass and/or facilitate collaboration and integration. Funding is intended to augment current infrastructure funding; not replace it or to take the place of funding that otherwise would be allocated to support health research infrastructure in the absence of MSFHR funding.

Below is a list of **examples** of eligible and ineligible items (the lists are not meant to be all-inclusive). MSFHR will determine eligibility on an individual basis for any items requested that do not appear on this list of eligible and ineligible expenses.

### Eligible Expenses

- Salaries of personnel supporting the operations of the Network/Platform including managers, coordinators, administrators and other personnel.
- Salaries of skilled technical staff required to operate and maintain Network/Platform equipment and/or the computers and IT networks that support them.
- Costs of computers for Network/Platform staff supported exclusively by MSFHR infrastructure funds.
- Costs for printers for Network/Platform staff supported exclusively by MSFHR infrastructure funds (maximum allowable expense for this item \$750.00 CDN).
- Costs relating to staff training.
- Recruitment/advertising costs relating to the hiring of Network/Platform Leaders/Co-leaders and/or staff.
- Network/Platform support office costs, including supplies, communications, stationery, photocopying, and network or internet access.
- Costs relating to the development and maintenance of a Network/Platform web site.

- Release time for Leaders/Co-leaders from clinical, teaching, or administrative duties so that they may commit time to leadership of the Network/Platform (capped to a maximum of \$25,000).
- Costs for specialist consultant services not otherwise available within the Network/Platform area.
- Costs relating to activities that bring people together, including workshops and similar meetings; video- and tele-conferencing; planning, co-ordination and outreach activities; and travel and accommodation.
- Costs relating to the transfer of knowledge to the research community, clinical practice and other stakeholders.
- Support for training in a defined training program developed by the Network/Platform or for training that is essential/ important for increasing participation in the Network/Platform.
- Support for mentoring and professional development activities for students and new investigators, including conference registration and related travel.
- Costs related to the development or purchase of shared research resources including surveys, software tools, databases, and specialized facilities.
- Grants and/or awards issued by the Network/Platform, limited to a maximum of 20% of available MSFHR award funds each year (including any carry forward MSFHR funds from the preceding year). This limit includes all grants and awards to individuals or groups (including seed, pilot, developmental, travel, conference, scholarship, and training grants and awards). See MSFHR's guidelines on Granting Activities (above) for further details and conditions.

### **Ineligible Expenses\***

- Stipends for students and trainees.
- Partial or full salary support for researchers other than release time for Leaders/Co-leaders from clinical, teaching, or administrative duties so that they may commit time to leadership of the Network/Platform (capped to a maximum of 50% of salary).
- General administrative costs inherent in managing human resources, finances, supplies, laundry, etc. (normally funded by the host institution).
- Capital costs (including furniture and equipment other than computers for staff supported exclusively by MSFHR infrastructure funds).
- Renting/leasing costs for accommodation and/or furniture for Network/Platform support office(s).
- Maintenance and repairs to facilities (including buildings, laboratories, other rooms, furniture and equipment allocated to research activities).
- Renovations to facilities including buildings, laboratories and other rooms.
- Costs of operating the facilities: heating, ventilation, air conditioning, water, electricity, etc.

- Liability, fire and other insurances.
- Maintenance and security costs.
- Cleaning.

\* If the Network/Platform can demonstrate the added value and make a case for an item identified as an ineligible expense, then MSFHR will evaluate the merit of the argument. **Such a case must be made before the expense is incurred.**