



Michael Smith Foundation for
Health Research

2009
Research Trainee Program
Evaluation Process

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Roles and Responsibilities

MSFHR Program Teams, in consultation with the MSFHR Research Advisory Council (RAC) are responsible for managing and coordinating all aspects of the review process, including the appointment of the Chair and the Reviewers who comprise the Review Panel and Readers (if required).

Programs Team

The Programs Team consists of MSFHR Programs staff who plan, coordinate, support, monitor and manage the funding programs. The members of the Program Team support all members of the Review Panel by conducting reviews in accordance with MSFHR guidelines, evaluation criteria and processes.

Chair

The Chair ensures the efficient, objective and fair review of all applications, and the overall operation and conduct of the review meeting. The Chair usually has some familiarity and previous experience with MSFHR (for example, as a Review Panel member).

Panel Members

The Panel Members' primary function is the impartial and objective review and rating of applications for funding. Each application is reviewed in depth by two (primary and secondary) reviewers, discussed and score confidentially by all review panel members.

Reader

The Reader has expert knowledge in the area of research of the applicant and participates by providing written feedback but is not required to rate the applications. A reader does not normally attend the review meetings. The feedback and comments are used by members of the Review Panel.

Selection of the Review Panel

The responsibilities of the Review Panel are specified in the Terms of Reference of the Peer Review Committees. At the end of each competition, MSFHR staff commences the process of confirmation of continuing terms/search for a Chair and potential Panel Members for the upcoming competition.

The Chair of the Review Panels is appointed by the RAC on the advice of MSFHR staff. Preference is given to persons who have had prior experience working in a similar role on other panels.

Potential Panel Members are identified through a variety of sources including lists of prior Reviewers, recommendations from RAC, the academic and research community, MSFHR staff and/or Applicants, and from environmental scans of investigators specializing in specific research areas applicable to the funding program or applications. Panel Members are also appointed by the RAC.

Personnel Award Panels are organized by the four research themes (Biomedical, Clinical, Health Services, and Population Health). In instances where there are a large number of applicants, review panels are further divided in order to maintain a reasonable workload for the reviewers.

MSFHR strives to maintain a diverse representation within the Review Panel. The goal is to achieve an equitable distribution of qualified reviewers in terms of gender, geographical location, and research interests.

Confidentiality and Privacy

All information contained in applications submitted to MSFHR, reports made by Panel Members, and any discussions by the Review Panel about MSFHR's funding programs or applications/applicants, are strictly confidential and subject to the BC Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA). All Panel Members are required to read and sign an [MSFHR Confidentiality and Non-disclosure Agreement](#) (PDF) prior to commencing the review.

By law, Applicants have access to their own application files, therefore written documents regarding the evaluation of an application are made available to the Applicants when they are notified of MSFHR's decision. The identities of the Panel Members are not revealed.

Conflict of Interest

In order to guarantee the integrity of the review process, MSFHR ensures that the ratings and rankings of applications or proposals are fair and objective. As such, all MSFHR reviewers are required to observe the [MSFHR Policy on Conflict of Interest](#) (PDF) and [Guidelines on Conflict of Interest](#) (PDF). No member of the Review Panel may participate in, or witness the review of, an application where s/he may be in a real or perceived conflict of interest.

Prior to the Review Meeting

After the funding application deadline, all selected Panel Members rank their level of knowledge and expertise against each of the applications that meets the eligibility criteria for the competition. Panel Members may rank their level of expertise as either: Expert, Intermediate Knowledge, No Knowledge, or declare a Conflict of Interest. Based upon this self-assignment, the Program Team will assign a Primary and Secondary Reviewer to each application. The Program Team may identify the need for additional reviewers at this time and recruit accordingly.

Prior to the review meeting, the Primary and Secondary Reviewers for each application will independently complete a thorough review, preparing written comments and an initial score for each application. At the same time, all Panel Members are responsible for familiarizing themselves with all of the applications and being prepared to discuss them at the review meeting.

Applications are rated according to established criteria for the individual award program.

The Review Meeting

Before the review of an application commences, any Panel Member who has declared a Conflict of Interest with that application will be asked to leave the room for the duration of the panel's discussion of that application.

The Primary and Secondary Reviewers will summarize the application's major strengths and weaknesses with their initial scores displayed to the panel. The Chair will then lead the panel's discussion, inviting participation from all members. The Primary and Secondary Reviewers will be given an opportunity to revise their initial scores based on the Panel's discussion. The Chair will ask the Primary and Secondary Reviewers to agree upon a consensus score, which may or may not be equal to the average of their two initial scores. All Panel Members, including the Primary and Secondary Reviewers, will then confidentially score each application within +/- 0.5 of the consensus score. The Chair generally does not score the applications. The final rating assigned to an application is the average of the confidential scores of all Panel Members. The overall rankings of applications against each other will not be made known until the end of the review meeting.

Once the review of all applications is complete, the Program Team will produce a list of 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.

Scoring

The purpose of scoring the application is to assign a rating based on merit, and to establish a ranked list of applicants in order to make funding recommendations. To ensure consistency, Panel Members use a common scale and apply the same convention in assigning ratings. MSFHR generally uses the scale developed by CIHR, ranging from 0 – 4.9, although the descriptor terms are frequently modified to better fit the nature of the competitions. Panel Members are encouraged to use the full range of scores.

As a guide, an application of average strength relative to other applications should receive a score of 3.0. If the overall score from both the Primary and Secondary Reviewers is below 3.0, little or no discussion is required by the full Panel, unless a Panel Member specifically requests discussion.

Funding Decisions

Applicants are notified of the outcome of the review process after the completion of the review meetings and approval by the MSFHR Board. The number of applications funded 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 a letter detailing the funding decision, the quartile ranking of their application, and comments from Primary and Secondary Reviewers and Readers (if applicable). A list of the funded applicants is published on the MSFHR website.

Continuous Process Improvement

MSFHR is committed to continual improvement in the process of reviewing MSFHR programs and/or applications for funding. After a review meeting Panel Members are asked to provide comments and feedback to MSFHR. On a regular basis the MSFHR Peer Review Oversight Committee (PROC) also provides advice and makes recommendations to the MSFHR Research Advisory Council (RAC) on policies and procedures pertaining to the monitoring, co-ordination and evaluation of the review processes of MSFHR's competitions.