



2017-A Health Policy Fellowship

APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

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Purpose

The purpose of the health policy fellowship application review is to ensure that the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research (MSFHR) engages health policy researchers and health system decision-makers to assess the quality of the applicant and the fit between the applicant and the health policy assignment.

MSFHR relies on application review to ensure accountability, not only to the provincial government — the source of MSFHR funding — but to the research community at large. MSFHR's Research Competitions team is responsible for managing and coordinating all aspects of the review process.

Principles of Application 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 or applicants are strictly confidential and subject to the BC Personal Information Act. Reviewers are required to read and sign the [Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure Agreement](#) prior to viewing any application information.

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.

Integrity

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.

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 might be construed as sarcastic, contentious, arrogant, or inappropriate in any way. Conversely, a constructive review, which provides comments that point out deficiencies that could be addressed in a resubmission, helps to assure an unsuccessful applicant that a fair assessment of their application was provided.

Conflict of Interest

MSFHR makes every effort to ensure not only that its decisions are fair and objective, but also that they are seen to be so. All MSFHR reviewers are required to read the [Guidelines on Conflict of Interest](#) (.pdf). All review panel members must read and sign the [Conflict of Interest Declaration Form](#) (.pdf) prior to viewing any application information. MSFHR Research Competitions team and the chair are responsible for resolving areas of uncertainty during the review meeting.

Selection of Review Panels

MSFHR's application review panels typically consist of a chair and panel members. Individual panel members are selected for their excellence and expertise in policy development, for their breadth of knowledge and maturity of judgment, and for their ability to make the time commitment.

Potential review panel members are identified in consultation with many sources, including recommendations from:

- The academic policy research community
- Health system decision-makers and knowledge users

Membership of the review panels should:

- Cover the range of the submitted health policy assignments
- Minimize conflict of interest
- Allow for adequate local and regional representation
- Provide appropriate gender balance

Roles and Responsibilities

The MSFHR **Research Competitions team** plans, coordinates, supports, and manages the Health Policy Fellowship Program. It supports review panel members to ensure that the application review process is conducted in accordance with MSFHR policies and procedures, guidelines, evaluation criteria, and business processes.

The **chair** must be familiar with the objectives of MSFHR's Health Policy Fellowship Program and provides oversight to the review panel. The chair 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. The chair also ensures the review panel functions smoothly, effectively and objectively in accordance with MSFHR's policies and procedures related to the review process.

The **panel members** provide critical assessment, constructive written feedback, and a rating for each application. They then vote confidentially on the consensus score during the review panel meeting

teleconference. Each application is reviewed in depth by a primary and secondary reviewer, who will be asked by the chair to share their reviews with the panel during the meeting.

The **policy assignment supervisor** provides an assessment based on their interview with the applicant and the information provided in the application package.

Peer Review Stages

1. Pre-Meeting Scores and Comments

The primary and secondary reviewers independently complete a thorough review, prepare written comments, and assign an initial score for each application. The rest of the panel members familiarize themselves with all the applications to prepare for discussions at the review panel meeting.

The policy assignment supervisor interviews the respective applicant, completes a thorough review, and assigns a score for the application that was assigned to them. The policy assignment supervisor is not required to familiarize themselves with all the applications.

2. Review Meeting and Final Scores

The two lead reviewers summarize the application's major strengths and weaknesses with their initial scores displayed to the rest of the panel members. The policy assignment supervisors do not participate in the review meeting; their report is included in the discussion of the applications. The chair leads the panel's discussion, inviting participation from all members. The primary and secondary reviewers will be given the opportunity to revise their initial scores based on the panel's discussion. Adjustments are made to the appropriate component of the overall score.

A consensus score is arrived at, which is average of the primary and secondary reviewer scores. All panel members, including the primary and secondary reviewers, confidentially score each application within +/- 0.5 of the consensus score. The final score assigned to an application is a combination of the average of the confidential scores of all panel members (75 percent of the score) with the policy assignment supervisor's score (25 percent of the score) to arrive at the final score assigned to an application.

For example:

Average of the confidential scores of all panel members	4.0
Policy assignment supervisor score	3.8
Calculation	75% of 4 = 3.0 <i>plus</i> 25% of 3.8 = 0.95
Final score	3.95

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 because it will not be considered for funding by MSFHR.

Once all applications have been reviewed, MSFHR's Research Competitions team will produce a list of the applications in ranked order, with the identity of the applicant masked.

Funding Decisions

MSFHR's Leadership Team will review and approve the top-ranked applicant recommended for funding in each policy assignment.

Applicants are notified of the outcome of the review process after results are approved by MSFHR's Leadership Team. There is no appeal process.

All applicants will receive a notification detailing the funding decision, as well as the reports from the reviewers. A list of successful applicants will be published on MSFHR's website following the competition.

Continuous Process Improvement

MSFHR is committed to continuous improvement in our peer review processes. The Evaluation & Impact Analysis team at MSFHR may contact panel members to provide feedback or recommendations on policies and procedures pertaining to the monitoring and coordination of the review processes of MSFHR's competitions.