CIHR UD Meeting (Webcast) January 7, 2021

Hello everyone,

The January CIHR-UD meeting was held by webcast on January 7, 2021. Here are the highlights:

Chair: Adrian Mota, Associate Vice President, Research Programs
1. CIHR Updates
A UDEC nomination process will be launched in January to identify a new UDEC member to replace a departing contributor. A call for nominations will be sent by email and UD members can self-nominate, with a biographical sketch. A secure vote of CIHR-UDs will be conducted. The successful candidate and all nominees will be advised.

Starting in late January, CIHR will host an online discussion on the topic of systemic racism in Canada's health research funding system. The goal of the discussion will be to identify specific measures to address barriers within CIHR structures that are faced by racialized communities. An update will be shared with the UD Network via email with the online discussion start date and details for joining the discussion.

Questions from members:
Who handles and is accountable for EDI related issues in the peer review process? For example: In instances of inappropriate reviews that may happen on occasion, how would they be handled and who is responsible for leading this? Is this something that will be decided after the discussion?
Any review quality issue or inappropriate review should come directly to CIHR. While there is not a process for grievances, CIHR does have a systematic process in place to assess complaints. Particularly in the context of concerns around EDI, CIHR wants to ensure these issues are brought forward allowing appropriate actions to be taken.

2. Upcoming Funding Opportunity: Health Research Training Platform (HRTP) Pilot
CIHR is launching the Health Research Training Platform (HRTP) Pilot funding opportunity. Nine CIHR Institutes and one CIHR Initiative support this priority-driven funding opportunity which was created to fill a gap in the career development opportunities available to trainees and ECRs. Through the HRTP Pilot, trainees and ECRs will have access to interdisciplinary training environments (i.e., "platforms") where they will benefit from high-caliber mentors and gain the skills required for academic and non-academic career development. The competition will launch on January 8, 2020.

3. Filling vacancies on CIHR's Governing Council
The Privy Council Office is looking to fill vacancies on various Government of Canada commissions, boards and advisory bodies, including CIHR's Governing Council. Information on current Governing Council membership can be found on CIHR's website. The Government is looking to solicit applications from individuals interested in sitting on CIHR's Governing

Council, responsible for its strategic direction and overall performance, and ensuring oversight of its budget, policies and operations.

4. Registration Lists
Discussions are ongoing around whether or not a list of registrations could be provided to institutions following the close of a competition registration deadline, which is not standard practice for CIHR. CIHR will be creating a survey to collect information about the value and the benefit of distributing registration lists to institutions, including what institutions are looking for and how the information could be shared with them.

5. College Chairs Resignations
The Chair of the College of Reviewers have resigned their roles. The resignations will have no impact on the operations of the College of Reviewers. These Chairs were appointed in 2016 to help establish CIHR's College of Reviewers, and to help support the recruitment of reviewers. They have achieved their current mandate with remarkable efficiency. CIHR will engage with the broader research community to examine the evolution of the Chairs' mandate and how it aligns with the College's future strategic directions of CIHR.

6. Funding Opportunities
Strategic Funding Opportunities
Strategic competitions resumed in September 2020. Current funding opportunities with deadlines as well as a list of funding opportunities with deadlines in January and February are available on the website. CIHR and NSERC are in discussions on the Collaborative Health Research Projects (CHRP) that had previously been delayed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Updates will be provided as they become available.

Fall 2020 Project Grant competition
Peer review is currently under way for the Fall 2020 Project Grant competition with meetings beginning January 14, 2021 and ending February 4, 2021. These will continue using the Microsoft Teams virtual environment. Reviewers are receiving training and resources to navigate the review committee meetings. Notice of Recommendation (NOR) will provide applicants with the application score, committee rank and reviews, and are anticipated for March 3, 2021.

Spring 2021 Project Grant competition
Registration will open on February 3, 2021 and will close March 4, 2021. This will allow Fall 2020 applicants to consider their results prior to proceeding with applications to the Spring 2021 competition. Application deadline is April 1, 2021; Peer review meetings: June 1-30, 2021; Anticipated notice of recommendation: July 8, 2021; Anticipated notice of decision: July 22, 2021. Funding start date: October 1, 2021

Questions from members:
Can there could be an expanded role for the UDs in reviewing the Project program?
Increasingly over recent years, CIHR has relied on the UD Network and UDEC to provide advice and input on CIHR's direction. The message regarding the resignation of the College Chairs alludes to this important role and the contributions of the UDEC, UD Network, the panel chairs and Scientific Officers (SO).

Could you please provide an update on the status of the Planning and Dissemination grant that was delayed last year?
The Planning and Dissemination grant is with senior management right now for decision. CIHR hopes to have more information on this, and other programs soon.

Is there an increase in the number of panel members who can be seen on screen in MS Teams at once during the project reviews?
Currently, limit is 9. MS Teams now has a 49-person view capacity. This is always dependent on individuals using their camera feature.

A researcher came looking for CIHR award opportunities that would provide a teaching release. We could only find archived awards on CIHR's website. We also reached out to CIHR to see if there are plans for future calls, but were referred back to their website. Are there any opportunities upcoming that would allow for teaching release?
CIHR staff are not currently aware of any future funding opportunities with teaching release for researchers. There are currently no new plans to reinstate the New Investigator Awards.

Will the Chair in Applied Public Health have release time support?
More information will become available when the funding opportunity is launched. To date, information has been shared by the Institute of Population and Public Health regarding the Applied Public Health Chairs Program launch.

7. Reviewer-in-Training Program
CIHR has been working to enhance the Early Career Researcher (ECR) Observer Program and it will be replaced with the new Reviewer-in-Training program. This new program will provide ECRs with an opportunity to both observe AND participate in face-to-face Project Grant peer review meetings. As part of the program, mentees will: Be assigned three applications to review, Be paired with a Chair or Scientific Officer for mentorship, Submit their practice reviews to their mentors for feedback, Present one of their reviews and participate in committee discussions during the peer review committee meetings, Receive feedback from their mentors on review quality and participation, Be invited for further peer review opportunities at CIHR. Mentees will not score applications or discuss budgets.

The Reviewer-in-Training program should be launched in time for the Spring 2021 Project Grant competition. The application and selection process will be the same as for the Observer Program. Currently, the plan is to make 120 places available for mentees (two per committee). CIHR intends to make incremental enhancements to the program based on participant feedback.

Questions from members:
Are ECRs, all new PIs or PDFs at late stage of training eligible?
ECRs who are eligible to apply would be included in CIHR's standard ECR definition. The requirement is that they have an academic appointment and are within 5 years of their first research-related appointment. Postdoctoral fellows (PDFs) are currently excluded. PDFs have the opportunity to participate as reviewers for the Doctoral Research Award (DRA) competitions.

The ECR definition includes the Covid-19 amendment, whereby CIHR has temporarily "paused the clock" for all ECRs for one additional year.

This may be a significant burden/imbalance for smaller committees. Maybe scale RITs to panel size?
CIHR will assign grants to ECRs based on their expertise. We understand that demand for this program is high. Limiting the program to two reviewers-in-training per committee will help Coordinators keep the meetings running efficiently. CIHR intends to expand the program incrementally.

The mentoring of reviews is more labor intensive than just observing, so perhaps room for both. The senior PDFs could just observe and ECR could do the mentored review.
This is something CIHR can consider for the future to create more opportunities and make the process manageable for the Chairs and SOs.

There is a large cohort of foundation grant holders that are potentially entering back into the project grant system in March/April. Imagine if for example NSB has ten returning Foundation grant holders, how will you ensure that regular project grant applicants are not disenfranchised by the return of superstars? (i.e., will you vary the number of grants awarded per committee depending on the application pressure from Foundation grant returnees?)
CIHR is aware of the issues and for many months has been discussing. It is important to acknowledge that when the Foundation Grant competition was launched, CIHR made a decision that created this outcome. A working group of Scientific Directors is helping us work through these issues, and a session is scheduled with a number of Chairs and SOs. CIHR will share more information when it is available.

Upward pressure on budgets - I am seeing in current grants that I am reviewing much larger budgets than in the past. Some are reapplications from CIHR spring COVID call (ie. 2-2.5M) and Foundation holders may also come back with big budget asks… How will this be handled in success rate?
The total number of grants that CIHR funds is always based on the budget requests of the top ranked applications. The success rate and number of grants funded will go down as budget requests increase. There is a large grant pool – the top 2% of budgets get grouped in the large grant pool. Once the funding runs out, there is no funding left. The peer review panels have an important role here: CIHR needs the panels to ensure the budget requests are appropriate and sufficiently justified.

What about greater scrutiny of budgets to watch for 'padding'?
CIHR indicated that it is the role of the peer review panel to ensure applicants are requesting appropriate budget amounts and making sufficient justifications.

Do we need to intervene and potentially account for this? Was it appropriate to let it happen in the first place?
How it happens will likely be disproportionate across the panels from an application perspective. Funding decisions are always made based on research excellence. CIHR committed to continuing to discuss the approach with the UD Network at a later date.

Additional comments from members for CIHR consideration:
There is no incentive to cut budgets at peer review committee (PRC) level, since it is the number of grants that are awarded at committee level, not the budget. Overall awards are budget based, but committees are allotted by percentile. This needs to change first. Give each PRC a budget instead of number of grants.

It might be a good idea to remind applicants of the large grant envelop for the Spring competition. Falling into that envelop (the low end of which is not fixed) further reduces success rate.

The difficulty is that different projects cost different amounts and some kinds of research is more costly - so the amount would be difficult to determine.

Next CIHR-UD meeting is on February 4, 2021.

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