

CIHR-UD Meeting June 21, 2019: Ottawa, Ontario

Hello everyone,

The annual face-to-face meeting of the CIHR-UD group was held in Ottawa on June 21, 2019. Here are the highlights.

Foundation Scheme Sunset

The presentation from CIHR staff highlighted key considerations for and impacts of the decision to sunset the Foundation Grant program. UD members were encouraged to continue to provide input on this topic as part of the strategic planning consultations. Information packages with details regarding transition options, webinars and scheduled calls will be available to Foundation Grant holders and research administrators this summer. It is recognized that not everything about the Foundation Program was done badly, and that many of the good things about Foundation could be incorporated into Project Scheme (i.e. programmatic and long term). However, the decision was made that the program was too broken to fix and did not meet many of its goals.

The discussion focused on the impacts of Foundation holder re-entering the Project Grant applicant pool. There will be a “funding cliff” for those coming off Foundation. CIHR has been requesting flexibility such that not all of the money saved by cancelling Foundation will be re-invested into Project, in order to allow CIHR to respond to other opportunities identified by the community (eg investigator awards). The importance of balancing the needs of the individual grantees with the overall funding ecosystem was raised. It was emphasized that there will be an impact to the system as Foundation holder re-enter the Project Grant competition (the denominator will grow), which will have an impact on relative success rates. Intervention options to smooth out this decrease were discussed. The question asked of UDs was whether it would be more important to broaden the base number of researchers funded or to invest more in those few who are internationally exceptional.

One suggestion was to use strategic funds to fill the “hole” in success rates that will accompany transition of Foundation to Project. Another suggestion is to stagger the transition to Project, perhaps extending funding of some on Foundation and limiting the number of grants to a given investigator to one or two submissions per Project competition. It was also discussed whether to eliminate the cross-board cuts to grant budgets and scrutinize them more closely (perhaps more detailed forms) to disclose padding. Concerns were expressed about the loss of mid-career investigators. Bias in peer review may impact these people more than others as Foundation transitions occur. Discussion of a possible cap on dollars from CIHR or grant number from CIHR. It was also suggested that peer review committees may require greater diversity in order to prevent some of the regional and societal disparities that are currently seen. Concerns were also expressed about funding overlap.

The following recommendations were put forward as means to support the transition.

- It was unanimously recommended that CIHR put all Foundation Grant funds into Project Grant.
- There was some discussion regarding the merit of investing in training initiatives. Some

member's view Project grants as acceptable mechanisms to support trainees, however, this approach disadvantages institutions with few operating grants (e.g. small institutions).

- Where possible, reallocate Strategic investments into Project Grant. Target areas can be accommodated through priority announcements. Perhaps Institute or Government Priorities could be used to use some of the top grants in the Project Scheme.
- Cap the number of Project Grants that can be submitted per competition to one, this will reduce the denominators.
- There was agreement that funding overlap needs to be restricted for Foundation holders applying to Project Grant early. Specifically, Project Grant funds cannot be additive to ongoing Foundation Grant funds- funding overlap needs to be managed. The importance of staggering Foundation holder re-entry was emphasized.
- Build peer review panels' understanding of why a Foundation grant recipient might be coming into the system early.
- There was mixed discussion around reinstating a one-page funding overlap disclaimer in the Project Grant application. It was proposed that this be managed outside peer review as an administrative process.
- Monitor mid-career success rates in Project Grant competitions, as they may be negatively impacted with the re-entry of Foundation Grant holders.

CIHR Strategic Plan

CIHR sought feedback from UD members to help inform the organization's strategic direction. The objective behind CIHR's national engagement with the research community, as well as the various phases of engagement and ensuing activities that will be taking place as part of the external consultations on the strategic plan (May 2019-December 2019) were highlighted to support discussions. Members were invited to use the sli.do interactive platform to vote on their top three (3) areas of interest for discussion. The result:

- CIHR's Investigator Initiated Research Area
- CIHR Budget
- CIHR's Strategic Priority Areas

The discussion focused on CIHR's Investigator Initiated Research Area, with some points raised regarding the CIHR budget. Members identified areas where improvements could be made to better support programs, research outputs, and the peer review process. Funding equity across all types of research, institutions (size), researchers (gender, career stage, etc.), was a key concern for members. The financial impacts of conducting research between smaller and larger institutions were discussed, and questions regarding budget and how these could be managed by committee (e.g., budget caps, specific budget per committee, etc.) were brought forward. Impacts on reviewer burden and success rates were raised throughout the discussion. Members agreed that CIHR should be creative with their dollars (including using strategic funding) to increase the success rates (by increasing the amount of funds available) and strengthen the Investigator Initiated Research program.

The following recommendations for improvements to better support programs, research excellence and outputs, and the peer review process were brought forward.

- Put all Foundation funds into Project.

- Move the strategic discretionary money (incl. institute priorities) to the Open program in the short term to help stabilize the impacts of Foundation grantees transitioning into Project.
- Look at strategic and government priorities, and see whether strategic goals can be met through the Project Grant program.
- Add a mechanism to support small, medium and large grants (without the use of budget caps). Three tiers to allow people to break in.
- Assess realistic budgets. Could include adding the budget in the scoring.
- Give a specific budget to committees to effectively balance all types of research grants. Questions regarding whether budgets would need to be based on the history of the committee (i.e., average grant size awarded) were brought forward.
- Eliminate across the board cuts, while maintaining success rates. Chairs, SOs and peer review panels should be provided with clear instructions to realistically handle/adjudicate budget based on the proposal. Cannot link the size of the grant with the excellence of the research.

Online engagement on the strategic plan was completed at the end of June. Consensus workshops are to take place in September. By application and 70 have been received so far. Select group and there is some concern about voices from the broader research community. Strategic plan discussion will go silent in the period leading up to the election. There will be a National Health Summit in December; invitation list will be published after the September workshops. In the period from January to April 2020, the strategic plan will be written internally.

Evolution of Project Committee Mandates

Staff presented the evolution of the Project Grant committee mandates, starting with the Fall 2018 competition. The information provided was in response to questions from members regarding the process for reviewing/updating/changing peer review committee mandates. The involvement of Chairs, reviewers, Scientific Directors and Scientific Officers was highlighted to reflect the importance of the science. University Delegates were encouraged to communicate their interest in engaging with CIHR on this ongoing work.

UD members indicated their desire to be engaged in work related to committee mandates/composition. Feedback on new committee mandates could be received via the UD monthly calls. The issue of undersubscribed committees, which includes but is not limited to conflicts of interest (e.g., due to their involvement in strategic competitions) and the reviewers self-declared ability to review, was also discussed. CIHR is closely monitoring gender differences in terms of reviewers declaring their expertise and ability to review and what women say they can and cannot review. This results in women being underrepresented on the peer review panels. The Tri-Agencies have been mandated by Treasury Board to develop EDI and ECR action plans. These include key indicators (e.g., ECR and women representation on peer review panels). Challenges around application transfers (currently at 20%) and “homeless” applications were addressed. Input from individuals that believe they do not fit on any current panels is being collected through the Project Grant applicant surveys. Members were reminded that the strategic planning efforts can help CIHR and the research community to address such challenges and concerns.

The following recommendations for improvements related to peer review panel mandates, and recruitment were identified.

- In order to address the concern that some applicants have with their applications being reallocated to other committees, members have recommended changing the application requirements (e.g., “Justification” section) so that applicants can explain why a particular panel has been chosen over another.
- Modify applicant panel selections to say “1st choice,” “2nd choice” and “No good fit.”
- Review the Ability to Review options (currently High, Medium, No) more strategically, and reconsider adding a “low” value. This would provide more flexibility in how CIHR qualifies a reviewer’s ability to review.
- Simplify the research community’s familiarity with and understanding of the peer review committees, based on their zone of interest, by building on Dr Sam Weiss’ work and linking the peer review panels with the CIHR Institutes they support (i.e., across all mandates and institutes).
- Build a multidisciplinary peer review committee to address the concern with “homeless” applications. This would further allow CIHR to identify the committees that are reducing in size, and to determine whether some of these could be lumped together.
- Identify opportunities to increase accommodations for peer reviewers (notably female) who may otherwise need to decline their reviewer invitations for various reasons (e.g., Skype for remote participation). The value of face-to-face peer review to support excellence was nonetheless supported by members.

College of Reviewers

A Reviewer Pathway is being proposed. This presentation solicited feedback from members on the key concepts of the initiative to ensure that it meets peer review training needs across career spans (beginning at the trainee stage) and reviewer types (e.g., Knowledge Users). This supports the College’s current focus of building review assurance and promoting capacity development/support.

Discussions focused on ensuring the best, most equitable, access to the College’s suite of programs to support the development of peer review skills and excellence in peer review.

- Working with institutions to create and implement a mock peer review toolkit, to ensure a broader reach of our support programs and processes.
- Expanding the Observer program to provide a more hands-on learning experience with a mentor and appropriate learning.
- For every peer review meeting, making sure that Chairs and SOs understand and outline expectations for considering and properly assessing considerations such as SGBA, French language applications, etc.

Canadian Common CV

This presentation provided an update on the Canadian Common CV (CCV) and sought input from UDs on the changes being considered to the system to enhance usability and the funding application process. Main areas for concern from the research community were addressed. The key priority areas to improve the CCV over the next 2 years were identified, including the work that is underway to modernize the application’s interface and improve the user experience. A mock-up of the proposed interface was provided and engagement opportunities to support this work (e.g., focus groups and user acceptance testing) were highlighted.

Information regarding the work that is currently underway for updating the CIHR Knowledge User (KU) CV template (i.e., type and format of the information collected) to enhance peer review and reduce reviewer burden was provided.

Discussions indicated the general recognition that the CCV is a concern and barrier to applying for research funding. While work is underway by the Tri-Agencies to modernize their grants management processes and systems, an interim solution to improving the CCV user experience is required, in part through the implementation of a new interface. For example, users will see improvements to the import functionality, which will facilitate the importation process. UD members were generally pleased with the proposed interface and provided additional input. Members were informed that discussions between the Tri-Councils regarding the possible integration with ORCID are underway.

Focus groups will be established over the summer months to inform the design of the new interface. University Delegates were invited to participate in focus groups over the summer months. User acceptance testing will take place in the fall. UD members will be provided with regular updates. The anticipated launch for the modernized CCV interface is by the end of year (2019).

CIHR sought feedback from UD members on the proposed Knowledge User (KU) template, which includes four categories structured within three pages. Members discussed the possible limitations of one's identification with the "Knowledge User" definition. For example, members of the Indigenous community identify themselves more as Knowledge-holders. Discussions have been taking place at CIHR to reevaluate the terminology used. CIHR will also be seeking input from patients. While this template was specifically designed for CIHR, consultations with SSHRC and NSERC are underway to determine how it might be used across the three agencies.

The following recommendations were brought forward to support improvements to the CCV interface.

- Remove additional click/selection for "Personal Information" (i.e., eliminate pop-up box and keep in browser).
 - Explore system integration with ORCID.
 - Add more filters to help with sorting. For example, for the Supervisory Activities, consider a search by group.
 - Add a count for the entries (e.g. table displaying the number of the different activities and/or contributions included).
 - Add a field to clarify individual's role on contribution, in particular for publications (i.e. ability to indicate and filter for Lead, Senior or Other.)
 - Review the "Contributions" section based on the new/current research landscape, turning to the peer review process to inform the assessment.
 - Move the list/menu of categories to the left side of the screen, instead of the right.
- KU Template The following recommendations for improvement to the proposed KU Template were provided by members.
- Substitute the term "Knowledge User" for "Knowledge User and/or Community Member to broaden its scope.

- Integrate the categories “Positions and Honours” and considering integrating the sections “Contributions to Knowledge Creation” and/or Knowledge Translation” within the “Personal Statement” section.
- The new template should be extended to a variety of Knowledge Users (i.e., in health clinics).

Next CIHR-UD meeting is on August 1, 2019. Bye for now!!

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