CIHR UD Meeting (Webcast) September 3, 2020

Hello everyone,

The August CIHR-UD meeting was held by webcast on August 6, 2020. Here are the highlights:

1. CIHR Updates
Spring 2020 Project Grant Competition
Chairs and SOs who participated in the competition met with CIHR this week for informal discussion on the remote peer review meetings. Notice of Recommendations (NOR) were sent on September 1, 2020. The Notice of Decision (NOD) will be released on September 15, 2020.

Fall 2020 Project Grant competition
Some changes have been made to reflect the COVID-19 pandemic and to address feedback previously received from applicants and reviewers from the Spring 2020 competition.
Fall 2020 Project Grant Competition timelines were adjusted:
-   Registration deadline: September 16, 2020
-   Application deadline: October 14, 2020
-   Notice of Recommendation: February 16, 2021
-   Anticipated Notice of Decision Date: March 3, 2021
-   Funding Start Date: April 1, 2021

Spring 2021 Project Grant Competition
-   Registration deadline: March 4, 2021
-   Application deadline: April 1, 2021
-   Anticipated Notice of Decision Date: July 22, 2021
-   Funding Start Date: October 1, 2021

CIHR is committed to increasing Indigenous health research capacity. Following consultations with representatives of Indigenous communities, and in the spirit of being more inclusive, CIHR has updated the eligibility criteria for the Project Grant competition. Starting with the Fall 2020 competition, individuals affiliated with Indigenous non-governmental organizations in Canada with a research or knowledge translation mandate will be eligible to apply to the Project Grant competition as Nominated Principle Applicants (NPA). Furthermore, Canadian NGOs with a research or knowledge translation mandate will also be eligible to apply to the Project Grant competition as NPAs.

Early Career Researchers (ECRs): CIHR is providing a temporarily adjustments to the period of eligibility for an ECR. All those who held ECR status as of March 1, 2020, or who secured their first academic appointment after this date, will have their status extended by one year.

Applicants to the Fall 2020 Project Grant competition will have the option of completing an additional page in their application to highlight how COVID-19 has impacted their work (e.g. impact on productivity). It will also be important that any potential impact on the feasibility of research to be undertaken is addressed within the research proposal. CIHR will create guidelines for reviewers when considering the impacts and delays caused by COVID-19.
Response to Previous Reviews: Applicants who choose to respond to previous reviewer comments will be required to include all of the reviews they received on their previous application—not just a selection

of the comments as has previously been the case. Note that applicants will not have to respond to all of the points raised—only those which are relevant to the revised application.

Fall 2020 Observer Program - CIHR is pleased to offer an Observer program for ECRs for the Fall 2020 Project Grant competition. All eligible applicants to the Spring 2020 Observer Program were informed on July 6th, 2020 that their application was retained and transitioned to the Fall 2020 Observer Program. Spring applicants do not need to re-apply.

Ask Me Anything Sessions - CIHR held three "Ask Me Anything" sessions the week of September 7th, 2020. A summary will be prepared and shared on [CIHR's website](#).

Questions from members:
A recommendation was made to consider extending the Fall 2020 Project Grant application deadline to October 16th to avoid a deadline right after the long Thanksgiving weekend.

Concern was expressed with the COVID-19 feasibility being considered in the peer review process for the Spring 2020 Project Grant competition. CIHR explained that peer review panel members were advised to not take into account impacts of COVID-19 on feasibility when reviewing applications. Applicants were encouraged to contact CIHR directly if the feasibility of their application was considered in the review of their application due to COVID-19.

Why are panel members from the same institution as the applicant allowed to stay in the room and vote if they say they do not know the applicant? CIHR explained that due to varying sizes of institutions, for large institutions it is possible that a conflict does not exist. CIHR relies on reviewers to declare their ability to participate based on CIHR's conflict of interest rules. It is a reviewer's responsibility to disclose any conflicts that exist.

2. Feedback from the Remote Peer Review Meetings
Feedback and recommendations received from UD members.
A recommendation was made that CIHR consider that reviewers in conflict could wait together in the same breakout room, allowing an opportunity to interact in between reviews. A member raised that there was a lack of interaction between panelists, and considered this to be a disadvantage of the remote peer review format. It was explained that it is important for the community and for younger faculty to have the opportunity to network at peer review meetings.
UD members felt that the participation level is higher when the peer review meetings are in-person and although virtual peer review meetings are valuable and necessary in the pandemic context, they are not a long-term solution. UD members recommended a hybrid model for the peer review meetings (e.g. one in-person meeting and one remote meeting every year). One UD member emphasized that the remote peer review meetings are a welcome option for parents since it is difficult for many to travel. One UD member indicated that the Sex and Gender-Based Analysis section is still weak in the applications. A recommendation was made to consider a scoring method of pass or fail.

3. Postdoctoral Fellow (PDF) Reviewers for the Doctoral Research Award (DRA) Program
PDFs will be invited to participate as reviewers in the DRA competition, allowing them to develop peer review skills through hands-on experience. As of October 2020, all applications submitted to the DRA competition will be reviewed entirely by CIHR-funded PDFs. There were two pilot studies conducted in

2016 and 2017, where PDFs had the opportunity to review applications. Based on the results of these studies, CIHR concluded that PDFs are proficient reviewers. PDFs who participated in the pilot studies found that it was a useful experience for them to review applications. This aligns with the CIHR Strategic Action plan on Training as well as the College of Reviewer's Reviewer Pathway, supporting the development of the next generation of researchers.

Questions from members:
How will PDFs be invited to review? Will they be asked to complete a reviewer profile for expertise/ language? CIHR confirmed that they will be inviting PDFs who are currently funded by CIHR. PDFs will be asked to complete a reviewer profile.

Can you clarify if CIHR-funded PDFs include individuals holding a CIHR Fellowship as well as PDF who are funded by a CIHR grant? Will there be discipline-specific reviews? CIHR confirmed that the eligibility includes only individuals who hold a CIHR Fellowship at this time.
Since the focus of the review of Fellowship applications is on the training environment, assignment are not based on the area of research of the application. Applications will continue to be assigned to reviewers by cluster.

Will reviewing for the DRA competitions be a condition for funding for CIHR Fellowship Award recipients? CIHR confirmed that reviewing for the DRA competitions will not be a condition of funding.

Recommendations were made by UD members to not limit this opportunity to only CIHR Fellowship recipients and that CIHR should consider implementing a recruitment strategy via department Chairs.

4. Strategic Funding Opportunities
CIHR announced in early April a three-month pause on existing and new strategic funding opportunities (FO), with the exception of FOs related to COVID-19, in order to focus their efforts on supporting the Government of Canada's response to the pandemic. Over the past months, a working group of Scientific Directors has been prioritizing all strategic FOs that have been approved internally to go forward. CIHR has since assessed the internal capacity to deliver these strategic FOs and the dates of the strategic FOs in ResearchNet will be updated soon.

CIHR reminded members that there will be a timeframe of two months between the re-initiation of the strategic FOs and the application deadline to allow applicants to prepare and complete their application. More information will be shared with the UDs when the new strategic FOs dates are available.

Next CIHR-UD meeting is on October 1, 2020. Bye for now!

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