How to prepare a Discovery Grant application

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June 11th, 2019 – University of Guelph
# Life Cycle of a Discovery Grant Application

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>August</th>
<th>September</th>
<th>October</th>
<th>November</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Submission of notification of intent to apply <em>(due Aug. 1)</em></td>
<td>Internal assignment to EG</td>
<td>Selection of external reviewers and preliminary joint review discussions</td>
<td>Submission of application <em>(due Nov. 1)</em></td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>December</th>
<th>January</th>
<th>February</th>
<th>April</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Members receive applications and begin reviewing</td>
<td>Members review applications and external reviewer reports are received</td>
<td>Grants competition</td>
<td>Announcement of results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notification of Intent to Apply (NOI)

Overview

- **Deadline:** August 1st - **Mandatory**

- **Main components:**
  - Research topics, keywords, title
  - Summary of proposal
  - Suggested external reviewers
  - Canadian Common CV (CCV)

- **Submission:**
  - Research Portal
Notification of Intent to Apply

Purpose

- Facilitates preliminary assignments:
  - to an Evaluation Group
  - of internal reviewers
  - of external reviewers

- First indication of joint review
  - Informed by research topics, keywords, and proposal summary

- First review of subject matter eligibility
Notification of Intent to Apply

Joint Reviews - Evaluation Groups

- Genes, Cells and Molecules (1501)
- Biological Systems and Functions (1502)
- Evolution and Ecology (1503)
- Chemistry (1504)
- Physics (1505)
- Geosciences (1506)
- Computer Science (1507)
- Mathematics and Statistics (1508)
- Civil, Industrial and Systems Engineering (1509)
- Electrical and Computer Engineering (1510)
- Materials and Chemical Engineering (1511)
- Mechanical Engineering (1512)
### Notification of Intent to Apply

**Joint Reviews - Conference Model in Action**

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<tr>
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<th>EE</th>
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**Notes:**

Applications involving members from more than one other EG (i.e. more than 2 EGs participating in the review) appear more than once.

Joint reviews involving more than one member from the same EG appear only once.

Reviews involving different streams of the same EG, without participation from other EGs, do not appear.

EG1508 provided a JR for EG 19 (SAP).
# Notification of Intent to Apply

## Transfers

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</table>
Notification of Intent to Apply

Tips

- **Select appropriate research topics**
  - First selected must be from suggested EG
  - Helps identify potential joint reviews

- **Submit a detailed summary**
  - Helps internal reviewers select appropriate external reviewers
  - Helps identify potential joint reviews
Tips for selecting external reviewers

- **Be mindful of conflicts of interest**
  - Reviewers outside your institution (primary & adjunct)
  - Adhere to [NSERC guidelines](#) (e.g., six-year window)

- **Identify the best expertise**
  - Ability to comment/review with confidence

- **Consider diversity in your selection**
  - National, International
  - Private, government, public sectors
  - Gender
  - Under-represented groups
  - Established, mid career, early stage researchers
Discovery Grant Application

Overview

- **Deadline:** November 1\(^{st}\) - *internal deadlines are earlier*

- **Main components:**
  - Application for a grant
  - Research proposal
  - Samples of research contributions
  - Budget and justification
  - Canadian Common CV (CCV)

- **Submission:**
  - Research Portal
Step 1: Merit Assessment

- Three equally weighted criteria:
  - Excellence of the Researcher
  - Merit of the Proposal
  - Contribution to Training of Highly Qualified Personnel (HQP)

- Uses six-point scale
  - From exceptional to insufficient
# Grants Competition

## Review Process

<table>
<thead>
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<th>DISCOVERY GRANTS MERIT INDICATORS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXCEPTIONAL</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledged as a leader who has continued to make, over the last six years, influential accomplishments at the highest level of quality, impact and/or importance to a broad community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed research program is clearly presented, is extremely original and innovative and is likely to have impact by leading to groundbreaking advances in the area and/or leading to a technology or policy that addresses socio-economic or environmental needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term vision and short-term objectives are clearly defined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The methodology is clearly defined and appropriate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The application clearly demonstrates how the research activities to be supported are distinct from those funded (or applied for) by other sources.

| **Past training is at the highest level in terms of the research training environment provided and HQP contributions to research.** | **Past training is far superior to other applicants in terms of research training environment provided and HQP contributions to research.** | **Past training is superior to other applicants in terms of the research training environment provided and HQP contributions to research.** | **Past training is superior to other applicants in terms of the research training environment provided and HQP contributions to research.** | **Past training compares favourably with other applicants in terms of the research training environment provided and HQP contributions to research.** | **Past training is modest relative to other applicants in terms of the research training environment provided and HQP contributions to research.** |
| **Most HQP move on to highly impactful positions that require skills gained through the training received.** | **Most HQP move on to impactful positions that require skills gained through the training received.** | **HQP generally move on to impactful positions that require skills gained through the training received.** | **HQP generally move on to positions that require skills gained through the training received.** | **Some HQP move on to positions that require skills gained through the training received.** | **HQP rarely move on to positions that require skills gained through the training received.** |
| **Training philosophy and research training plans are of the highest quality: highly appropriate, clearly defined and expected to produce top quality results in terms of the overall approach and specific projects for HQP.** | **Training philosophy and research training plans are far superior: highly appropriate, clearly defined and expected to produce high quality results in terms of the overall approach and specific projects for HQP.** | **Training philosophy and research training plans are superior: highly appropriate, clearly defined and expected to produce quality results in terms of the overall approach and specific projects for HQP.** | **Training philosophy and research training plans are appropriate and clearly defined in terms of the overall approach and specific projects for HQP.** | **Training philosophy and research training plans are partially appropriate and partially defined in terms of the overall approach and specific projects for HQP.** | **Training philosophy and research training plans are not appropriate and not clearly defined in terms of the overall approach and specific projects for HQP.** |

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2The Discovery Grants Merit Indicators should be used in conjunction with the Peer Review Manual which outlines how reviewers arrive at a rating.
Grants Competition
Conference Model

Reader

Second Internal

Conflicts?

Excellence
Exceptional
Exceptional
Outstanding
Outstanding
Very Strong

Merit
Outstanding
Outstanding
Very Strong
Very Strong

HQP
Outstanding
Outstanding
Very Strong
Very Strong
Moderate

Non-participating member
Reader
First Internal

Program Officer
Section Chair
Grants Competition
Review Process

**Step 1: Merit assessment**

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Exceptional</th>
<th>Outstanding</th>
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<th>Strong</th>
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Outstanding – Very Strong – Very Strong

**Step 2: Funding Recommendation**

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Grants Competition
Review Process

Step 2: Funding Recommendations

- Applications grouped into ‘bins’ of comparable merit

- Similar overall ratings within an EG receive comparable funding

- Possible adjustment related to the cost of research
Discovery Grant Application
Excellence of the Researcher

Assessment based on achievements demonstrated over the past six years (2013 – 2019).

- Knowledge, expertise, and experience (in the NSE)

- Quality and impact of contributions to Natural Sciences and Engineering (NSE) research

- Importance of contributions to researchers and end-users
Discovery Grant Application

Excellence of the Researcher

Members will assess this using information from:

- **Most significant contributions**
  - Highlighted quality and impact

- **Samples of research contributions**
  - Up to 4 attached with application *within the last 6 years*

- **CCV contributions, recognitions, activities**
  - Additional information on contributions in application
Discovery Grant Application

Merit of the Proposal

Assessment based on the following elements:

- Originality and innovation
- Significance and expected contributions to research
- Clarity, scope of objectives, and appropriateness of methodology
- Feasibility
- Appropriateness and justification for the budget
- Relationship to other research support
Relationship to other research support

– Budget requested in DG is for different expenses than the ones supported (or to be supported) by other sources.

– The DG proposal is distinct conceptually from research supported (or to be supported) by CIHR and/or SSHRC.

– *New in CY2018* For CIHR Foundation Grant holders only: convincing evidence that support from DG is essential to carry out the work proposed.
Discovery Grant Application

Merit of the Proposal

Members will assess this using information from:

- **Research proposal (5 pages)**
  - List of references (2 pages)

- **Proposed expenditures and budget justification**

- **Relationship to other research support**
  - CIHR and/or SSHRC summary and budget pages
  - CCV research funding history
NSERC supports research whose major challenges lie in the natural sciences and engineering (NSE), other than the health sciences.

The intended objective(s) of the research must primarily be to advance knowledge in one or more of the NSE disciplines.

Applicants should refer to:

- **Selecting the Appropriate Federal Granting Agency**
- *Updated* **Addendum to the Guidelines for the Eligibility of Applications Related to Health**.

  - The Addendum provides examples that illustrate the eligibility of applications related to human health.
Assessment is based on both:

- the past contributions to training; and
- the future plans for training

Quality research training at all levels are valued, including:

- Undergraduate students involved in research
- Graduate students and postdoctoral fellows
- Technicians and research associates
- Other research personnel from non-academic sectors i.e. government, or industry
Discovery Grant Application
Contributions to the training of HQP

Past contributions to the training of HQP
Assessment based on training over the past six years

**New Instructions in CY2018**
Include three components:

1. Training environment
2. HQP awards and research contributions
3. Outcomes and skills gained by HQP
Past contributions to the training of HQP

Other items to consider:

- Explain the level, context, and role in supervision and co-supervision
- Note impact of delays in training (those taken by the applicant or HQP)
- Focus on quality and impact of training

Members are instructed not to rate Early Career Researchers (ECRs) as *Insufficient* solely due to a limited past record of contributions to the training of HQP.
**Privacy Considerations**

- **Past Contributions to HQP Training**
  - If describing a record of training a diverse group of trainees, any HQP demographic information should be clearly linked to the practices which achieved the equity, diversity and inclusion, and should be in **aggregate format**.
  - Due to privacy and confidentiality concerns, do not include personal identification data linked to individuals.
Discovery Grant Application

Contributions to the training of HQP

Future plans for training

**New Instructions in CY2018**

Include two components:

1. Training Philosophy
   - Describe approaches that promote increased inclusion and advancement of under-represented and disadvantaged groups in NSE

2. Research Training Plan
   - Focus on quality, suitability and clarity of plan
   - Must be planned training in the NSE
   - Define your role in any planned co-supervision
**Additional requirement - CY2020**

- **HQP Plan**
  - Beginning CY2020, as part of the *Training Philosophy* element, applicants are expected to describe the specific measures they commit to implementing in order to promote equity, diversity and inclusion in the training environment.
  
  - Additional text will appear in the **Merit Indicators Grid** describing EDI considerations within the *Training Philosophy* element.
Discovery Grant Application
Contributions to the training of HQP

Evaluation Group will assess HQP using information from:

- **Application:**
  - Past contributions to HQP training
  - HQP training plan

- **CCV**
  - Supervisory activities and contributions
  - Trained HQP who co-authored should be identified with an asterisk “*”
  - Do not use “academic advisor”
Summary - EDI with Evaluation Criteria

- **Excellence of the Researcher**
  - Applicants are asked to describe (if applicable) contributions towards the promotion of equity, diversity and inclusion in the research enterprise

- **Merit of the Proposal**
  - Applicants are asked to describe (if applicable) consideration of sex, gender and diversity in the research design

- **Contributions to the Training of HQP**
  - Applicants are required to describe EDI considerations they commit to in their future approach to recruitment, training and mentoring
  - Applicants are asked to describe EDI measures implemented in the past training of HQP (if applicable)
Discovery Grant Application

Delays

- Applicant delays are recorded in the CCV, under the Employment section

- HQP delays are recorded in the HQP section of the application

- In both cases, clearly explain
  - the **duration** (i.e., start/end dates)
  - the **impact** on your research (e.g., dissemination of results, ability to recruit HQP)
Discovery Grant Application

Tips

- Read other successful applications
- Ask colleagues and/or your RGO for comments on your application
  - Ask both experts in your field and non-experts to review
- Plan ahead and check institutional deadlines
- Use the resources available
Discovery Grant Application
Available Resources

- Discovery Grants Information Centre
- Peer Review Manual
  - Includes information on each of the three criteria and the merit indicators (the Grid!)
- HQP FAQ Document
- EDI Guide for Applicants
- Webinars on how to apply
  - NOI and full application stages (French and English)
RGS Program Updates
Support for Early Career Researchers

- The ECR eligibility window is now 5 years (previously 3 years) to harmonize with the other agencies *(New!)*

- NSERC devotes additional funds to support ECRs through
  - increases to Discovery Grants
  - Discovery Launch Supplement *(New!)*

- ECRs re-applying for the first time have the option of extending their DG by one year with funds
Primary Caregivers (Pilot)

- Researchers who become primary caregivers following the birth or adoption of a child and who are eligible for maternity or parental leave but decline the leave, may be eligible to receive a one-year grant extension with funds.

Family and Medical Leave

- Grant holders who plan to take family-related leave or medical leave may be eligible for a grant extension with funds for up to two years.

Paid Maternity / Parental Leave for Students and Postdoctoral Fellows paid from Grants

- Students and Postdoctoral fellows who are supported by NSERC grants and are eligible may receive up to 6 months of paid maternity / parental leave.
- The leave supplement will be paid by NSERC.
Other Updates:
Committee on Discovery Research (CDR)

- One of two standing committees of NSERC Council
  - Provides advice to Council and VP of Research Grants and Scholarships (RGS) on funding opportunities and related policy issues
  - Meets at least twice a year

- Membership
  - 15 members, representative of community served by RGS
  - Diverse, balanced representation (gender, language, region, institution size, career stage, sector)

- Members
  - May act as a channel to bring issues, concerns, etc. to the attention of CDR (and NSERC)

NSERC News

Collection of Self-Identification Data

Why is self-identification data collection important?

• Driven by the Government of Canada’s commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the federal research enterprise.

• Also guided by:
  – Canada Research Coordinating Committee’s work plan includes “removing barriers faced by under-represented and disadvantaged groups to ensure equitable access across the granting agencies and establish Canada as a world leader in equity, diversity and inclusion in research”;
  – Budget 2018 which requires the granting agencies “to publish an annual report for Canadians on progress in addressing challenges in the research system, including equity and diversity, and support for researchers at various career stages”; and
  – Canada’s Fundamental Science Review’s recommendation that federal funding agencies “should collaborate to improve data collection and analysis”.

What questions are included in the mandatory self-identification form?

The granting agencies ask for the following information:

1. Age - What is your date of birth?
2. Gender – Select the option that you identify with, i.e. Woman; Man; or Gender-fluid, non-binary; and/or Two-Spirit
3. Indigenous Identity – Do you identify as Indigenous - that is First Nations (North American Indian), Métis, or Inuit?
4. Person with a disability – are you person with a disability?
5. Visible Minority - Do you identify as a member of a visible minority in Canada?

Completing the self-identification form is mandatory, but for each category there is an option for “I prefer not to answer.”
NSERC News

Collection of Self-Identification Data

Progress to date:

– Summer 2018: An open letter from Tri-Agency Presidents to the research community

– May-December 2018, collection of self-identification information from applicants and co-applicants to all funding opportunities
  • Questions focussed on age, gender, Indigenous identity, and status as a member of a visible minority group or person with a disability
  • Over 10,000 forms collected over this period (NSERC data)
  • High response rates (over 90%, all fields combined)

Upcoming data collection:

– Implementing self-identification data collection from members of panels and reviewers;
– Including members of governance committees in self-identification data collection.
Thank you!