



10. Activities for March and April

10.1 Communication with Applicants

Requests from applicants for an explanation of the results of the competition must be redirected to NSERC. If approached by researchers, Evaluation Group (EG) members should tell them that NSERC requires that all enquiries about individual cases be sent to NSERC, and that EG members are not permitted to discuss the deliberations specific to any case. EG members may wish to point out that NSERC regulations require them to leave the room during discussion of a colleague's application.

This policy has been developed as a result of such experiences as:

- requests from a number of senior university administrators to present a single, coherent message to grantees/applicants, and reduce the time wasted in what is often misinterpreted rumours;
- serious complaints from EG members being bombarded by telephone calls;
- applicants playing one committee member off against another;
- oral comments being taken out of context, or misinterpreted, and then fed back to NSERC as a complaint against the EG;
- disagreement between the written EG comments and the “grapevine”;
- appeals launched on the basis of the oral comments of an EG member.

10.2 Finalization of Messages to Applicants

The program officer reviews all messages to applicants. This step ensures that any feedback to applicants is consistent with NSERC policies and guidelines, and is clear and detailed enough to be useful to the applicant in preparing future submissions. Occasionally, the program officer may identify problems with the comments and will discuss the case with the section chair. In some cases, the problem will be resolved by clarifying the comments with the author. In other cases, it may be necessary to review the basis for the recommendation and/or the recommendation itself. While these cases are rare, EG members may be consulted on such cases.

The section chair reviews and approves all messages to applicants before these are sent to researchers, to ensure that the comments reflect the consensus of the EG. All researchers, including those who do not automatically receive comments from the EG, will automatically be sent the referee reports. Researchers must not correspond with EG members or referees.

10.3 Annual Report

The EG annual report represents the formal record of the group chair's and section chairs' feedback on the competition and is distributed to members of NSERC staff and members of the

Committee on Grants and Scholarships (COGS) for information and follow-up. It is a key source document for policy discussions of COGS. Occasionally, the EG annual report is distributed publicly to such groups as department chairs in a given discipline, professional associations, etc.

The EG annual report is prepared by the group chair and section chairs with assistance from the program officer and should be finalized in April. It should highlight:

- competition outcomes and the EG's general impression of the quality of proposals, evaluation criteria, pressures on the budget, issues of concerns and new areas of research;
- comments and recommendations on policies and procedures. These could include, but are not limited to, feedback on program philosophy and objectives, and their link to the optimal use of resources for the support of sciences and engineering;
- trends and issues within the discipline, comments on program delivery mechanisms, program literature and forms, and identification of research suitable for public relations efforts;
- competition statistics that may be included as an appendix to the annual report or within the body of the report. As these numbers and statistics do not represent the final and official results of the competition (these are to be prepared for the May meeting of the Committee on Grants and Scholarships), a disclaimer to that effect will appear on the first page of the report and also on these appendices;
- additional topics relevant to the EG.

10.4 Membership

Following the February meetings, program officers will formulate recommendations for new appointments to the EGs. These recommendations include comments on the background, stature and experience of nominees, as well as references on their suitability to participate in the peer review process and work in a committee setting. Factors such as the nominee's involvement in cross-disciplinary and collaborative research may also be considered. Past EG members may be approached by the program officer to provide such comments and references.