



## 9. Activities for February

### 9.1 Logistics for Competition Session

#### 9.1.1 Agenda

Program officers, in consultation with the section chairs, will prepare an agenda for the competition session and forward it to members prior to the meetings.

#### 9.1.2 Physical Arrangements

##### Hotel and Travel

The competition sessions are held for a number of EGs on NSERC's premises, Constitution Square, Tower II, 350 Albert Street, Ottawa, and for others at a nearby facility. Out-of-town members usually stay at a hotel in downtown Ottawa close to the NSERC offices.

Information regarding travel and physical arrangements for the February meetings will be sent to members in December. At such time, members will be required to confirm their hotel and travel arrangements through Carlson Wagonlit by Global Travel Centre, NSERC's travel agent (see [Appendix 4](#)). **Members not requiring travel arrangements must still contact NSERC's travel agent to confirm their hotel reservations.**

### 9.2 Roles and Responsibilities for EG Members and NSERC Staff

#### EG Section Chair

The section chair provides leadership to ensure the orderly and complete evaluation of applications and the transmission of accurate recommendations to NSERC. The section chair ensures that all important aspects of proposals are considered and that a consensus is reached for all applications.

The section chair leads the EG section's efforts to maintain the high quality of the peer review process. This includes advance briefing of EG members and ensuring the consistency and equity of approach of the EG in the February meetings.

The section chair contributes to discussions on policy issues, new emerging areas of research, particular discipline problem areas, etc. This includes input on the EG's annual report.

The section chair coordinates the preparation of Messages to Applicants during the competition session to ensure that they reflect the full EG consensus and not the views of a single member.

### **EG Members**

See also Section [1.2](#) of this manual. Specific responsibilities during the February meetings include:

- presenting in-depth evaluations for the applications assigned to them as 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> reviewer;
- reading, being ready to discuss, and voting on all assigned applications;
- preparing the Messages to Applicants (Form 141) that reflect the group consensus;
- adhering to NSERC's guidelines and regulations on the review of applications, conflict of interest, communication with applicants and confidentiality.

Members may also participate as part of a section to evaluate RTI, MRS applications, etc. This will be confirmed by the program officer.

### **Program Officers**

- The program officer advises on NSERC policies, guidelines and procedures, and helps ensure consistency in evaluation of all applications assigned to the EG;
- Ensures that recommendations are accurately recorded and that Messages to Applicants that reflect the consensus of the EG are prepared where they are required;
- Ensures that recommended awards conform with the budget allocated to the EG and with NSERC guidelines;
- Brings any problem areas to the attention of the section chair or the group chair, or to the team leader or director;
- Ensures consistency of approach (e.g., use of referees, evaluation of RTI applications, funding policy) from year to year;
- Assists the EG in the use of the reference material provided by NSERC;
- Assists the EG in identifying candidates for membership.

Program officers are not EG members and do not vote on applications.

### **Group Chairs**

Group chairs are members of the Committee on Grants and Scholarships (COGS). In this capacity, they act in the best interest of all areas of science and engineering, while bringing to the discussion their particular knowledge of the disciplines under their purview.

One of the principal roles of group chairs during the competition sessions is to monitor the quality of review in the EG under their responsibility and to interact with them as necessary. This includes acting as a constructive critic, advising EGs on NSERC policies and procedures, and representing their opinions and concerns to COGS and to NSERC. While the group chair role is associated with disciplines close to their own field of expertise, they are encouraged to sit in on EGs in other disciplines to familiarize themselves with those discipline-specific issues or dynamics.

Group chairs are not members of the EGs under their purview and do not vote. They may attend only part of the competition sessions and normally attend policy meetings of the relevant EGs. More specifically group chairs will:

- Chair and participate on the EG executive committee
- monitor the effect of the budgetary situation on new applicant recommendations, success rates and grant values;
- advise NSERC on special requests from EGs;
- attend the discussion of specific cases, as identified by NSERC staff;
- when possible, attend the discussion of applications from EG members (the Conflict of Interest Guidelines require the presence of a group chair or delegate);
- observe the mode of operation of the EGs, peer review process, group dynamics and other issues;
- assist with the preparation of Messages to Applicants, as needed;
- identify any policy issues that may require discussion at COGS or action by staff;
- participate in the discussion of the membership for the following year. Group chairs help NSERC to identify next year's section chair(s) for EGs, in consultation with the NSERC staff, the current section chair(s) and senior EG members;
- review the statistics on and trends in awards made upon recommendation of the EGs and the list of any other awards approved by executive action;
- periodically review the jurisdiction of EGs and recommend changes as appropriate.

The work of a group chair, like that of an NSERC staff member, is a delicate balance of advocate, advisor and critic. The EGs have full responsibility for the evaluation of grant and scholarship applications assigned to them according to policy guidelines established by NSERC. Only in situations involving a violation of guidelines or "unfair" evaluation is a recommendation overturned. The group chairs and NSERC staff work together to monitor the quality of review and to develop policy.

## **Directors**

The directors (Research Grants) work with group chairs to monitor the quality of peer review and the effectiveness of programs. They also identify and monitor policy issues and provide advice to group chairs and program officers on the interpretation of policies and rules.

When possible, directors attend the policy meetings of the EGs under their responsibility.

### **Team Leaders**

The team leaders are responsible for discipline groupings. They observe the deliberations of all EGs under their responsibility, maintain relationships with the EGs, provide advice to program officers and EGs on policy, specific cases and procedural issues and assist with problems. They attend the policy meetings of the EGs and brief members on new developments at NSERC and identify new section chairs for EGs.

### **Program Assistants**

Program assistants provide support to program officers in all aspects of the competition, e.g., by preparing Messages to Applicants and other documents as needed, by assisting with requests for joint reviews, and by replacing the program officers for short periods of time, as required.

### **Program Operations Unit Staff**

Secretariat Offices will operate throughout the competition. The Secretariat is the first point of contact for questions/problems regarding logistics and physical arrangements (meeting rooms, food, security and keys, light, photocopying, faxes, changes in travel arrangements, messages, etc.).

## **9.3 Procedures for Presenting Applications**

Before discussion of each application, the section chair will ask if members wish to declare a conflict (see Sections, [6.7.1](#) and [7.4](#)). Refer to EG procedures for specific details on presenting applications. An important consideration for making the conference model work is adhering to the EG's schedule. Section chairs and/or program officers must ensure that discussions proceed at a rate that will allow the EG to get through its work within the time available, and EG members should be aware of this while presenting and preparing their presentations ahead of time

## **9.4 Message to Applicant (Form 141)**

Following the discussion of each Discovery Grant application, the program officer will indicate if a Message to Applicant is needed and will designate a member to prepare it.

While reviewers may have drafted comments prior to the February EG discussion, the final version must reflect the consensus of the EG. EGs are encouraged to finalize as many comments as possible during the competition session. The Messages to Applicants are collected regularly from the EG, and returned for verification. Members preparing comments should ensure that they are drafted before the end of each day and should

verify them with the other members for accuracy and completeness before submitting them to the program officer.

## **9.5 Policy Meeting**

EGs may hold a brief policy meeting following the completion of its deliberations. The policy meeting generally includes a discussion of the quality of applications, the number and quality of new applicants, selectivity, problem cases, comments on NSERC's administrative services, policies, forms, literature, etc.

In addition, feedback from the EG is sought on policy matters currently under review at NSERC.

## **9.6 Membership Recommendations**

The process of identifying new EG members to replace those whose term ends in June continues throughout the fall and winter. To facilitate and accelerate the process of completing the EG's membership for the following year, all information about the background, stature and experience of nominees should be forwarded to the program officer. References on the nominees' suitability to participate in the peer review process and to work in an EG setting should also be provided.

The policy meetings will include a discussion of the EG membership. Ideally, all potential members should have been identified at that time so that the EG as a whole can discuss the suggestions and establish priorities.

## **9.7 Confidentiality of EG Funding Recommendations**

EG funding recommendations are made by the executive committee and are subject to approval by NSERC and may be changed for reasons of budget, administrative error or lack of full adherence to NSERC policies. NSERC communicates the results of the decisions on grants in late March following final approval. Master lists are released to each university shortly before, or concurrent with, individual letters of notification. Funding decisions are also posted on the NSERC Web site.

Details of the EG discussion on a specific applicant are confidential and must **not** be divulged to others. Release of information to applicants **must** be done by NSERC. **Under no circumstances** should EG members divulge to anyone the recommendations emanating from the February competition or relating to appeals subsequent to the competition.