



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 routed through 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:

- serious complaints from EG members being bombarded by telephone calls;
- applicants playing off one committee member 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;
- 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.

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 solved 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, you 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, automatically receive reports from referees (if they are available on file). Researchers must not correspond with EG members or referees.

10.3 Annual Report

The EG annual report represents the formal record of the EG's and section chair's feedback on the competition and is distributed to members of NSERC staff and 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 section chair(s) with assistance from the program officer and should be submitted by April 1. It should be short (four to five pages) and highlight:

- the EG's general impression of the quality of proposals, pressures on the budget, issues of concerns, new areas of research and success stories;
- 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.
- Suggestions for new EG members;
- Additional topics relevant to the EG.

Some of these issues may be covered in the minutes of policy meetings and need not be repeated, but may be referenced. The program officer will prepare the minutes of the policy meeting and complement these with statistics prepared by staff, e.g., number of applications and awards, success rates, mean and median grant, frequency distribution of awards and changes in grant levels. Some program officers will include these minutes as an appendix in the EG annual report. The program officer will also maintain and update documents on EG procedures.

10.4 Membership

Following the February meetings, program officers will formulate recommendations to the corporate secretary 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.



10.5 Appeals

An appeal of a decision on an NSERC application must be based on a compelling demonstration of error or procedural unfairness in the review process. The appeal procedure is designed to ensure that the applicant has been treated fairly and consistently in the context of a program that has limited funds. NSERC strives to provide equitable treatment of applications and fair assessments in accordance with the selection criteria, and existing budgetary constraints. EG members are not usually involved in the analysis of appeals of decision. NSERC normally reviews appeals in consultation with senior advisors with previous experience in the NSERC system who were not involved in the original review of the application.

For details on the appeal process, consult the [Web site](#).