



4. Activities for November

4.1 Policy Meetings/Discussions for Evaluation Group Members

4.1.1 Policy Meeting

Evaluation Groups (EG) often hold policy discussions in October or November to discuss the upcoming competition and discipline issues. These discussions are usually held by video or teleconference. If a face-to-face meeting is required, it will usually be held in Ottawa, and may require a full day.

The purpose of the policy discussion is four-fold:

- To discuss the EG's evaluation process, including the responsibilities of each member, and future membership
- To inform EG members about the impact of any new NSERC policies or initiatives
- To discuss the functioning of the EG in the context of NSERC policy (addressing any specific problems encountered in the last competition)
- To discuss long-term issues for the discipline, emerging research challenges, funding needs, etc.

4.1.2 Orientation Session for New Members

An orientation session will be held in November for new members of your EG with the Evaluation Group chair(s), and program officer. This session is often held by video or teleconference. The purpose of this session is to inform new members of important NSERC policies and EG practices, and also to give new members an opportunity to ask questions. Alternatively, some EGs will combine the orientation session with policy discussions. You will be informed of the format used by your EG. The program officer and the Evaluation Group chair will present information on the following topics:

- **Competition Cycle** – An overview of the timetable of the Discovery Grants competition, with information on the responsibilities of EG members at different points in the cycle. Also covered will be the role of the program officer, program assistants and Evaluation Group chair(s).
- **Conflict of Interest** – NSERC's guidelines on conflict of interest, with tips on how to avoid potential conflict of interest situations
- **Communication With Applicants and Confidentiality** – What you should and should not discuss with applicants during your tenure as an EG member in communication with applicants at information sessions, during informal



interactions, and through EG comments to applicants written during the Discovery Grants competition.

- **Discovery Grant Programs and the Review Process** – An overview of the criteria and review procedures for the various grant types. What to look for in various sections of the Discovery Grant application and the Personal Data Form; the use of referee reports, reprints and formal consultations; the assessment of excellence and contributions to research and training; the pitfalls of paper counting; and how to assess contributions to collaborative research. This section may also include the mock review of an application.

A detailed agenda will be posted on the extranet at the relevant time.

4.2 Assignment of Applications to Evaluation Groups (EGs)

4.2.1 General Principles

NSERC decides which EG reviews a particular application. EGs provide funding recommendations within specified policies and budgets determined by NSERC. Each EG has the responsibility to assess all applications assigned to it.

Fiction	Fact
Applicants apply to an EG.	Applicants apply to NSERC. As part of the application process, they will indicate in which EG they believe their application belongs. NSERC verifies application assignments in consultation with EG members. Assignments are made on the basis of providing the best possible peer review.
An EG is expected to review applications in terms of their importance to the EG disciplinary themes.	An EG is expected to review an application in the context of its absolute merit.
An EG may reject an application because it does not fit within its disciplinary themes.	An EG should advise NSERC that an application may be improperly assigned. Assessments must not be influenced by the EG’s perception that the application belongs elsewhere.



4.2.2 Chairs' Meeting

A meeting of all EG chairs is held in mid-November. The main purpose of this meeting is to ensure that applications are assigned to the most appropriate EG.

Assignment of applications is made by NSERC on the basis of selection of EG by the applicant, staff assessment, past review history and advice from the EG. Applications are tentatively assigned according to selection of EG by the applicant. Selection of EG and ultimate assignment should be based on the audience which is likely to be the most relevant for the research.

At the chairs' meeting, all doubtful cases are decided.

4.2.3 Cross-Assignments

There will be a number of applications that span the discipline coverage of more than one EG.

Applicants are asked to indicate, on Form 180, the research topics that are relevant to their proposed research. On the basis of this information, NSERC ensures that all aspects of the proposal are appropriately reviewed. This will take place through the selection of appropriate referees and the involvement of members from more than one EG in the review.

4.2.4 Eligibility of the Subject Matter

University research is supported by three federal granting agencies—NSERC, SSHRC and CIHR—each with specified mandates.

The mandate of NSERC is to support research in the natural sciences and engineering (NSE). NSERC also supports and encourages interdisciplinary research and realizes that this may span the mandates of more than one agency. However, Discovery Grants are meant to support long-term research programs that are predominantly in the NSE. Thus, any proposed research must demonstrate promise of significance, high impact and advancement of knowledge, or the use of knowledge, to develop novel solutions to practical problems in the NSE in the short and long terms.

EG Chairs and members should bring to the attention of their program officer any applications for which the subject matter may not be appropriate for NSERC's mandate. The eligibility of these proposals will be reviewed by NSERC in consultation with SSHRC and/or CIHR before a decision is made. For proposals more suitable for SSHRC, a mechanism is in place to enable the transfer of applications if identified early enough.



4.2.5 Late Identification of inappropriately assigned applications

Any inappropriately assigned application discovered after the November chairs' meeting should be brought to the program officer's attention **immediately**. Flagging such applications to the attention of the program officer, even during the competition session, is better than having it come to light when the application review begins. The early identification of a inappropriately assigned applications allows the opportunity to ensure a fair and thorough assessment.

4.2.6 Incomplete Applications

The onus is on the applicant to provide sufficient information, addressing the selection criteria, to allow peer assessment. This is particularly important in cases where the applicant has funding from multiple sources. Should NSERC staff determine, in consultation with the EG chair, that the information provided is insufficient, NSERC may withdraw the application from the competition.

4.3 Assignment of Reviewers for Research Tools and Instruments (RTI)–All Categories

RTI Grant applications are reviewed in different ways, depending on the type and number of applications and on the practices of the Evaluation Group. In some cases, the EG may form a section that reviews all RTI Grant applications on behalf of the EG. In other EGs, the applications are assigned to EG members as reviewers based on their areas of expertise, and all EG members participate in the deliberations. Normally, each EG ranks each application, and the number of awards depends on the budget available each year.

Your EG chair or program officer will inform you of the process followed by your EG and will explain your role. You may be asked to evaluate RTI Grant applications and to submit ratings, rankings and/or partial funding recommendations ahead of the competition meetings.

Section [7](#) contains a detailed description of the review of Research Tools and Instruments Grant applications.