



3. Activities for September

3.1 Initial Mailout

In early September, we will send you or post on your GSC Extranet some documents related to:

- policies and procedures;
- the review process; and
- the upcoming competition.

There will be a covering note indicating the priority attached to each item.

3.2 Assignment of Internal Reviewers

Using the list of potential applicants or the Notification of Intent to Apply for a Discovery Grant (Form 180) submitted by applicants, the Chair assigns each application to the committee members who are the most appropriate to review the application (while balancing the workload). Although members review all applications assigned to them, most GSCs use internal reviewers (two normally) who conduct an in-depth evaluation of a proposal. In selecting internal reviewers, attention must be given to possible conflicts of interest (see Section [6.6](#) for rules) and linguistic considerations.

You must inform the Chair and Program Officer of:

- problems with your assignments, such as linguistic constraints (Form 180 indicates the intended language of the application) or a conflict of interest not previously apparent (family member, personal, etc.);
- an application that is in your area of expertise but also covers areas where your GSC has little or no expertise, because it is possible to consult with other GSCs to complement the review;
- any applications you believe should be reviewed by another GSC; and
- any applications you believe do not fall within NSERC's mandate (i.e., research in the natural sciences or engineering).

Note: You may be asked to review applications that are not in your primary research field.

3.3 External Referees

A thorough assignment of external referees is critical to the success of the peer review process. This section outlines the general procedure and timetable for this activity.



Various documents/lists/spreadsheets will be made available to assist with the assignment of external referees, including a referee databank and copies of Forms 180 submitted by applicants.

NSERC is also starting to post Forms 180 on your GSC Extranet. More information will be sent to you as it becomes available.

The first internal reviewer is normally responsible for selecting the appropriate external referees from the applicant's suggestions on Form 180, the referee data bank* and his/her knowledge of the community (watching for conflict of interest and linguistic capability). He/she provides the choice of five referees for each application by selecting two or three from the list suggested by the applicant. Suggestions may be added in the right hand column on the back of Form 180 (see [sample](#) of Form 180 in Section 3.7). The internal reviewer also indicates in which order referees should be contacted (i.e., numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). He/she then returns the form to NSERC or to the GSC Chair as per the Program Officer's instructions. Note that this form will now be available on your GSC Extranet (more details will follow).

** An electronic version of the referee databank is available on your GSC Secure Site. A paper copy is available upon request.*

NSERC contacts the first three referees identified by the internal reviewer on Form 180. The other name(s) are kept as backup should one of the first three referees be overused or advises NSERC early in December of his/her inability to provide a report.

Referees **must** have:

- appropriate expertise to comment with confidence; and
- linguistic skills to review the application (including a minimum of two reviewers whose first official language is the same as that used in the application).

Referees may be:

- from the user sector as well as the university sector; and
- from Canada or abroad.

Referees **must not**:

- be, or have been in the last six years, from the same university as the applicant(s);
- have been a research supervisor or graduate student of the applicant(s) within the past six years;
- be providing letters of support for the application;
- have collaborated with the applicant(s) within the past six years or have plans to collaborate in the immediate future;



- be an employee of a non-academic organization with which the applicant has had collaboration within the past six years;
- be in any potential conflict of interest (e.g., personal, financial); or
- be assigned more than three proposals for review (NSERC does this verification before mailing requests to referees).

Referee Selection

- Select the best possible referees for each application, i.e. those closest to the application's field and who are likely to provide a comprehensive, unbiased, critical review.
- For interdisciplinary research, ensure that the referees selected have (individually or collectively) expertise in all the relevant disciplines and aspects of the proposal. If necessary, indicate on Form 180 which and how many referees should be approached to ensure a complete review.
- Use a good cross-section of referees, i.e. from young researchers to well-established ones, from academia and industry (where appropriate).
- Do not rely solely on the list of referees suggested by the applicant unless he/she has fully covered the field by his/her suggestions. Propose other referees.
- Include at least one of the referees suggested by the applicant in the first three to be contacted, provided of course that the referee is suitable.
- A single referee should initially be assigned no more than two applications as this will provide a safety factor in cases where the same referee is used by another GSC or an extra application needs to be added due to another referee being overused.
- Some applicants may request the exclusion of a specific researcher as referee on their application. You should consider these requests during the selection of external referees, within reasonable limits. Contact your Program Officer if you have concerns about the appropriateness of the request.
- For applications that are submitted two years in a row, attempts should be made to select a few different referees each year.

All applications must receive a full and detailed evaluation regardless of the official language of presentation. On occasion, this may entail consultation with NSERC staff to identify external referees with adequate linguistic capability.

Schedule of Events – Identification of Internal Reviewers and Selection of Referees	
August 1	Deadline for receipt of Forms 180.
Late August	<i>Members indicate the level of comfort with potential applications.</i> Chair receives a copy of all Forms 180 and identifies the two to three internal reviewers for each application.



Mid-September	Chair returns the list of internal reviewers to NSERC. NSERC sends to each member (or posts on the GSC Extranet) the Forms 180 of applications for which he/she is the first internal reviewer for selection of referees as well as information on how to access the referee databank on the GSC Extranet.
Note: You must advise the Chair and Program Officer immediately if you are in a conflict of interest, if an application should be reviewed by another GSC, or if you have doubts whether the application falls within NSERC's mandate.	
October 1	The internal reviewer returns the selection of referees to NSERC.
October/November	Staff enters referee names in NSERC's database, verifies referee workload and mails the applications to referees.

3.4 Information Sessions (formerly Site Visits)

There are two main objectives for the information sessions.

- To communicate information to the community about NSERC policies, regulations and review processes. The information conveyed during these sessions will deal with substantive issues related to policy directions, competition data and budget allocations. Those presenting the information must be fully conversant and knowledgeable about these issues and must be able to answer, in a consistent manner, questions requiring the interpretation of policies and rules. This is mainly the responsibility of NSERC staff. *Detailed information on the application review process is normally presented by a GSC member.* Some of the information discussed during the sessions is specific to GSCs; GSC members therefore participate actively in this aspect, providing valuable information on selection processes and budgetary pressures.
- To maintain dialogue with the community, receiving feedback on applicants' and grantees' experiences with NSERC programs and procedures and discussing issues. The participation of both NSERC staff and GSC members is essential; staff being responsible for following up on policy and administrative issues while GSC members contribute to discussions on the peer review process.

NSERC information sessions are **not** used to evaluate applications or researchers.

If any, individual meetings with applicants should focus on factual information about the review process, the research program or individual circumstances.

GSC members may be asked to participate in an information session organized at their institution or at one nearby. NSERC staff will contact you, as required.



3.5 GSC Membership

Replacements for members in the last year of their term should be discussed as early as possible. Committees should begin thinking about membership early in the competition year and continue over the following months. Your GSC may decide to create a sub-committee in September for the purpose of discussing membership and with the goal of completing the identification of potential new members by February. Your Chair or Program Officer will let you know how your GSC will function in this regard and how you can contribute. NSERC encourages as many suggestions as possible. Potential new members can be established researchers, new scientists and engineers, from large or small universities, and from government or industry. Potential candidates need not be NSERC grantees. In making suggestions for membership, you should examine the recent history and current membership of the committee. The Program Officer can provide you with this information.

For more details about the membership process, refer to Appendix [1](#).

3.5.1 GSC Chairs

GSC Chairs are appointed by NSERC in consultation with Group Chairs and, as deemed appropriate, members of the GSC and other members of the community. NSERC asks GSCs **not** to make a formal recommendation for Chair. Advice on potential Chairs should be given to the Program Officer, Team Leader or Director.

3.6 Instructions on How to Complete and Submit Your Referee Suggestions

General Information about a Notification of Intent to Apply for a Discovery Grant (Form 180)

Please refer to Sections 3.2 and 3.3 of the *Peer Review Manual* for more information on the selection of internal reviewers and external referees. Attached is a sample of a fictionally-completed Form 180. The encircled numbers refer to the following tips:

1. Grant Selection Committee (GSC) assignment: Form 180 is normally sent to the GSC that reviewed the last application. An internal reviewer should advise the GSC Chair and NSERC staff of applications that should be considered for transfer. Until this is confirmed at the mid-November Chairs' meeting, the former GSC should proceed with the selection of internal reviewers and external referees under the assumption that the application will remain with the GSC.
2. In consultation with GSC Chairs over the next few weeks, staff will identify the appropriate review route for interdisciplinary applications. This could include:
 - (1) review by a discipline GSC with a formal consult from another GSC(s); or
 - (2) review by the Interdisciplinary GSC with formal consult from relevant



- discipline GSC(s). At this stage, as with all applications, internal reviewers should carefully select referees to ensure adequate coverage of all aspects of the proposed research. Clearly indicate if this would require more than three referees to be contacted.
3. Conflict of interest: In this case, Referee “E” was the applicant’s supervisor at the doctoral and postdoctoral level. This referee should not be selected. The publication list attached to Form 180 may also help identify other situations of conflict of interest, such as collaborations. The applicant may have written to indicate that the application should not be refereed by a certain individual for various reasons; this should be taken into consideration. Refer to Section [6.6](#) of the *Peer Review Manual* for more information on conflict of interest.
 4. Research subject codes and keywords relate to the proposed research. The Referee Databank may be searched in different ways (e.g., by referees, by research subject codes, etc.). NSERC Referee Databanks provide you with the following information for each referee: name, Personal Identification Number (PIN), address (department and university/organization), research subject codes, area of expertise and reading capability.
 5. Verify the intended language of the application; it may or may not be the same as the language used for Form 180.
 6. Identify the referees that should be contacted. NSERC will contact the first three listed (priority is from top to bottom of the column). The other names provided will be kept in reserve. If one of the first three referees is overused (i.e., already assigned three applications) or informs us upon receipt of the request that he/she is unable to do the review, staff will send the application to the alternate referees

Note: If you know that the address given by the applicant or in our Databank is incorrect, provide the correct address (indicate if the new address is a temporary one, such as a sabbatical address).

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR REFEREE SUGGESTIONS

a) Submit Referee Suggestions Electronically

- *Select an applicant’s Form 180 located in your personal document library. Example: Committee_123_White-Catherine_F180_ID#12345678.pdf.*
- *From your personal document library, identify the Excel spreadsheet associated with the applicant’s Form 180. Example: Committee_123_Leblanc-Catherine_Suggestions_ID#12345678.xls.*
- *Download the associated Excel spreadsheet.*
 - *Select the document name.*
 - *A “File Download” dialogue box will open Select Save.*
 - *A “Save as” dialogue box will open Select where you would like to save the document. Select Save.*



- A “Download Complete” dialogue box will open. Select *Open* if you would like to open the document, or select *Close* if you would like to close the “Download Complete” dialogue.
- *Open the downloaded spreadsheet and enter your suggestions in the COMMITTEE MEMBER SUGGESTIONS columns*
 - If you select one of the applicant’s suggested referees, simply write the code letter (A to E) and the referee name. If you can find this referee in the Databank, write the PIN in the appropriate space.
 - You should choose referees who are not suggested by the applicant. If this referee’s name is in our Databank, simply write his/her name and PIN. If you cannot find the referee’s name in the Databank, give the complete name of the institution, mailing address and e-mail address (if known).
 - *Save the file on your hard drive.*
- *Upload the Committee Member Referee Suggestions Excel document from your hard drive to the extranet.*
 - *From your personal document library on the GSC Extranet, select Upload Document, which is located at the top of the document list.*
 - *An Upload Document page will open.*
 - *To specify the location of the document to add, select **Browse**.*
 - *Locate the document you want to add and select **Open**. You will return to the Upload Document page.*
 - *Select **Save and Close**, which is located in the top left-hand corner of the upload menu bar.*
 - *Your document has been uploaded to the document library and your suggestion submitted.*

To continue, return to the beginning of the instructions.

b) Submit Referee Suggestions by Fax

- Select a potential applicant’s Form 180 located in your personal document library and print the third page.
- Use the right-hand column to enter the referees that should be contacted. If you select one of the applicant’s suggested referees, simply write the code letter (A to E) and the referee name in the right column. If you can find this referee in the Databank, write the PIN in the appropriate space.
- You should choose referees who are not suggested by the applicant. If this referee’s name is in our Databank, simply write his/her name and PIN. If you can’t find the referee’s name in the Databank, give the complete name of the institution, mailing address and e-mail address (if known).
- Fax the page to 613-947-3847.

3.7 Form 180 – Notification of Intent to Apply for a Discovery Grant