



4. Activities for November

4.1 Policy Meetings/Discussions for GSC Members

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

4.1.1 Goals

The purpose of the policy discussion is four-fold:

- To discuss the GSC's evaluation process, including the responsibilities of each member, and future membership
- To inform GSC members about the impact of any new NSERC policies or initiatives
- To discuss the functioning of the GSC 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 GSC with the GSC Chair, Program Officer and possibly a Group Chair. The purpose of this session is to inform new members of important NSERC policies and GSC practices, and also to give new members an opportunity to ask questions. Alternatively some GSCs will combine the orientation session with policy discussions. You will be informed of the format used by your GSC. The Program Officer and the GSC Chair will present information on the following topics:

- **The Competition Cycle** – An overview of the timetable of the Discovery Grants competition with information on the responsibilities of GSC members at different points in the cycle. Also covered will be the role of the Program Officer, Program Assistants and 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 GSC member. Communication with applicants at information sessions, informal interactions, and through GSC comments 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 GSCs

4.2.1 General Principles

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

Fiction	Fact
Applicants apply to a GSC.	Applicants apply to NSERC. NSERC assigns applications to GSCs in consultation with them. Assignments are made mainly on the basis of the best capability for thorough evaluation.
A GSC is expected to review applications in terms of their importance to the GSC discipline.	A GSC is expected to review an application in the context of its absolute merit.
A GSC may reject an application because it is not germane to its central discipline theme.	A GSC should advise NSERC that an application may be improperly assigned. Ultimately a GSC is responsible for assessing all applications assigned to it. Assessments must not be influenced by the GSC's perception that the application belongs elsewhere.

4.2.2 Chairs' Meeting

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

Assignment of applications is made by NSERC on the basis of staff assessment, past review history, suggestions from the applicant or requests from the GSC for re-assignment. Applications are tentatively assigned according to the discipline coverage of the GSC. Assignments are normally based on the audience which is likely to be the most relevant for the research. Final assignment will ultimately be decided according to which GSC has the overall expertise to evaluate the proposal. *This should be based on the expected mandate of the GSC and not just the existing expertise of committee members.*



At the Chairs' meeting, all new applications, doubtful cases and those assigned initially to more than one GSC are flagged for attention.

When renewal applications are transferred from the GSC that last reviewed the application to a new one, the amount of the current award will also be transferred to the new GSC's budget.

4.2.3 Cross-Assignments

There may be a number of applications in fields that span the discipline coverage of more than one GSC.

Applicants are asked to indicate on Form 180 if their research is interdisciplinary, and to identify the disciplines 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 external reviewers, consultations with other GSCs or assignment of the application to the Interdisciplinary GSC.

When in doubt as to the GSC assignment, staff will assign an application to one GSC and cross-assign it to one or more other GSCs. The GSC Chairs then have the opportunity to discuss amongst each other and with NSERC staff to determine which GSC is the most appropriate to review the application. There may be cases where two GSCs will jointly review an application or one GSC may ask another for a written review of the application in advance of the February meetings. Any application involving three or more committees in the review is usually assigned to the Interdisciplinary GSC. Proposals that appear not to be within a committee's expertise may require discussion with NSERC staff concerning the possibility of special consultation with other GSCs or advisors, or transfer to the Interdisciplinary GSC.

4.2.4 Consultations With Other GSCs

The consultation mechanism aids in the review of applications at the boundary between disciplines, or for which an aspect of the proposed research falls outside of the expertise of a given GSC. The GSC responsible for the review and final funding recommendation seeks written consultations from other GSCs for certain aspects of the proposal which are outside of its expertise base. The Chair of the GSC being consulted will identify the member(s) who has the appropriate expertise to provide the consultation or may provide the name of one or more external reviewers. You may be asked to provide such consultations. If so, you must prepare a detailed **written** report that will ultimately be available to the applicant. *In preparing your report, you should assess the application both in the broad context of research and in the specific context of research conducted in your particular discipline.* In rare cases, you may be asked to attend the GSC discussion, either in person or by teleconference.



4.2.5 Requests From the Interdisciplinary GSC for Consultation Reports

GSC structure is currently based on major discipline groupings. Increasingly, research questions transcend the scope of these groupings, or require expertise from a number of disciplines. The review process must ensure a thorough review of the proposal in its entirety. Sections 3.3, 4.2.3 and 4.2.4 address this issue with respect to the selection of external referees and consultations with other discipline GSCs.

Alternatively, interdisciplinary applications will be assigned to the Interdisciplinary Committee. “Interdisciplinary” is used in this manual to describe applications in areas that are at the boundary between disciplines or that involve more than one discipline. The Interdisciplinary Committee consists of members with expertise in a number of disciplines. For all applications reviewed by this committee, expert advice is sought from external referees and members of discipline GSCs. This input is very important, since the Interdisciplinary GSC relies heavily on the reviews of consultants from other GSCs when making a funding recommendation. At the Chairs’ meeting, GSC Chairs must provide names of committee members who can provide consultations to the Interdisciplinary GSC. As these consultations are **essential**, GSC members will be asked to provide their input **before the Christmas holidays**.

GSC members writing reviews for the Interdisciplinary GSC must provide reports that are as detailed as those they would prepare when reviewing applications for their own GSC. The review should address such issues as the approach, methodology, novelty and feasibility of the proposed research. The significance of the results of the research and the importance of the applications of the research should also be evaluated. Consultants are encouraged to seek input from other members of their GSC where necessary.

4.2.6 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.



GSC Chairs or 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.*

4.2.7 Late Identification of Misassignments

Any potential misassignment discovered after the November Chairs meeting (e.g., while reading exhibit books) should be brought to NSERC's attention immediately. Flagging a misassigned application, even during the competition session, is better than having one come to light later. The early identification of a misassignment allows the opportunity to ensure a fair and thorough assessment. Correcting an assignment error after the competition makes it difficult to provide an assessment that is consistent with the treatment of other proposals.

GSCs cannot reject applications on the basis that they are outside their purview. **Researchers apply to NSERC, not to a GSC**, and no applicant should be penalized because his or her field of research is not within the field of interest of a particular GSC. In these cases, other GSCs should be consulted, as appropriate.

4.2.8 Incomplete Applications

The onus is on the applicant to provide a sufficient description of past contributions and the proposed research plan to allow peer assessment. Should NSERC staff determine in consultation with the GSC Chair that the information provided is insufficient, NSERC may decide to withdraw the application from the competition.

4.3 Assignment of Internal 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 GSC. In some cases, the GSC forms a subcommittee that reviews all RTI Grant applications on behalf of the GSC. In other GSCs, the applications are assigned to GSC members as internal reviewers based on their areas of expertise, and all GSC members participate in the deliberations. Normally, each GSC ranks each application and the number of awards depends on the budget available each year.

Your GSC Chair or Program Officer will inform you of the process followed by your GSC and will explain your role. You may be asked to evaluate RTI Grant applications and to submit ratings or rankings ahead of the competition meetings.

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



4.4 Review of Research Tools and Instruments (RTI) – Categories 2 and 3 Applications

NSERC is extending its [*moratorium*](#) on Research Tools and Instruments (RTI) – Categories 2 and 3 Grants for another year. These categories normally cover equipment costing more than \$150,000. Again this year, only applications for Research Tools and Instruments – Category 1 will be accepted.

RTI – Categories 2 and 3 applications are reviewed separately from RTI – Category 1 applications. A GSC will make the final recommendation on single-discipline RTI – Categories 2 and 3 applications if the number of applications is sufficient to allow for a competition and a budget allocation (normally this requires at least five applications). When individual GSCs do not have a sufficient number of RTI – Category 2 and Category 3 applications, Selection Committees for groupings of disciplines (e.g., Selection Committee for Life Sciences, Engineering, etc.) may be created to make final recommendations on RTI – Categories 2 and 3 applications that fall within those groupings. These committees may also make final recommendations on equipment costing close to \$150,000, the upper limit for RTI – Category 1 Grant applications. The membership of discipline grouping committees is limited to representatives from the relevant GSCs but may also consist of members who have served on GSCs in the past. In November, you may be asked to serve on such a committee. They typically meet just prior to the start of GSC deliberations in February.

A multidisciplinary Selection Committee will make final recommendations on RTI – Categories 2 and 3 applications with input from appropriate GSCs or Selection Committees for groupings of disciplines in cases where these do not have their own budget allocation or in the case of very large RTI requests. This committee may also consider, for final recommendation, some multidisciplinary RTI – Category 2 and Category 3 applications that are beyond the purview of those Selection Committees described above.

In November, your GSC Chair will be asked to assign internal reviewers for all RTI – Categories 2 and 3 applications related to your discipline. If any are assigned to you, you will be informed at that time. In cases where a grouping of disciplines will form a Selection Committee, you may be assigned to sit on such a committee. (See Section [7](#), and specifically 7.10, for more details on the review of RTI – Categories 2 and 3 applications.)