



5. Activities for December and January

5.1 Receipt of Exhibit Books, Reprints and Other Documents

In December, you receive your “exhibit books,” which include all the applications assigned to your GSC for recommendation or comment. The exhibit books include:

- copies of the instructions given to applicants on how to prepare an application;
- an index;
- Discovery Grant applications; and
- Research Tools and Instruments Grant applications.

Also sent at that time are:

- samples of contributions (e.g., reprints) for Discovery Grant applications for which you are an internal reviewer.

Posted on your GSC Extranet at the same time are:

- rating forms for Discovery Grant applications (in a form-fillable PDF version); and
- rating forms for Research Tools and Instruments Grant applications (in a form-fillable PDF version).

If you are a member of a sub-committee (e.g., review of RTI – Categories 2 and 3 applications [see Sections [4.4](#) and [7.10](#)] or review of a *Major Resources Support (MRS) grant* [see Section [8](#)]) you will also receive exhibit books containing applications for that committee.

We recommend that you examine the applications assigned to you as an internal reviewer and determine whether:

- you are in conflict of interest;
- you have the linguistic capability to understand the proposal;
- the subject matter of the application is suitable for NSERC or more appropriate for another granting agency;
- the application is best assigned to your committee; or
- a consultation should be obtained from another committee.

Notify your Chair or Program Officer of any difficulty with the applications. Staff will consult with other committees and arrange for transfer of the application or a formal consultation as appropriate. If you don't understand an application because it is written in another language, consult your Program Officer. Do not have the application translated.



This would breach the confidentiality of application material. Furthermore, NSERC cannot reimburse the cost of translating applications.

Throughout January and February, you receive the following:

- Referee reports
- Written consultations from members of other GSCs
- Site visit reports or referee reports for RTI – Categories 2 and 3 applications or MRS applications

As the February competition session approaches, it may be necessary for NSERC and your GSC Chair to send additional memos and information. Every effort is made to keep these to a minimum to avoid disrupting your review activities.

5.2 Travel Arrangements for the Competition Session

See Appendix [4](#): Travelling on Behalf of NSERC for details on arranging your travel for the competition session.

5.3 How to Organize Your Review Activities

GSC members frequently comment that, by the end of their third year on the committee, they understand the process well enough to organize all the material that they are given. As you will see, there is a large volume of material to review (several thousand pages for most GSCs), and handling it efficiently can save you much time and aggravation. There is no one way that is best, and each individual finds his/her own method. However, you should give careful thought ahead of time to how you will handle your review; trying to change things in the middle of January can be disastrous. Experienced GSC members find that setting up a dedicated application review environment works best. This could be a special room or a special table.

After the policy meeting or orientation session, you will understand the review process much better, and this is the time to decide how you will organize yourself. Talk to other members of the committee to see how they organize themselves. For example, some reviewers find "stick-on" notes very good for noting points they would like to see included in "Comments to the applicant," so they can easily pass them on to the individual writing the comments during the competition session. Sample rating forms for members' use are available in Section [6](#) for Discovery Grants and Section [7](#) for RTI (Research Tools and Instruments).

Remember that there are two sets of Discovery Grant applications that you are dealing with – those for which you are just a reader and those for which you are an internal reviewer. Obviously, you are doing a much more detailed evaluation of the latter than the former. Some members read all of the former category before the latter, some the reverse, and some intermix them – decide which will work best for you. Some members also



choose to review RTI applications first or vice versa. Remember that you will have started your reading in December, but the referee reports don't start arriving until January, and continue doing so right up until the competition session. If you delay the start of your reading until the first set of referees' reports arrives, you will run out of time before the competition starts.

5.4 Legal and Ethical Issues

5.4.1 *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*

NSERC has adopted an environmental assessment (EA) policy and review process to ensure that all NSERC-funded research adheres to both the letter and spirit of the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (CEAA)*. Potential environmental impacts of proposals are assessed by NSERC EA Officers in parallel with the peer review process.

Applicants must complete an Environmental Impact statement (Appendix A of an Application for a Grant [Form 101]) and a *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* Pre-screening Checklist (Appendix B of Form 101) if they propose work that:

- is conducted outside an office or laboratory; or
- involves the construction, operation, modification, decommissioning, abandonment, or other activity in relation to a built structure that has a fixed location and is not intended to be moved frequently.

The information in Appendices A and B of Form 101 allows NSERC EA Officers to determine whether or not the proposal is subject to an environmental assessment screening under the CEAA or NSERC's Policy on Environmental Assessment.

It is possible that applicants will submit proposals that might have a negative impact on the environment, but are not subject to the CEAA. In such instances, applicants will be required to complete an Environmental Assessment Screening under the [NSERC Policy on Environmental Assessment](#).

In some instances, the NSERC EA Officers may contact experts in various relevant fields to comment on the appropriateness of proposed methodologies, mitigation measures, etc.

5.4.2 Confidentiality of Application Material

When you were appointed to the GSC, you were asked to read and sign the [Conflict of Interest, Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure Declaration for Members of NSERC Selection Committees or Panels \(Form 251\)](#) describing NSERC's expectations and requirements.

All application material (exhibit books, printouts, notes, financial summaries, referee reports) is provided to committee members in strict confidence and must be used for



review purposes only. Such material should be kept in a secure place that is not accessible to colleagues or students.

You should leave your application material (except your personal notes) at the competition centre for disposal by NSERC. If NSERC requires your assistance to provide additional information for particular cases after the competition (e.g., for an appeal case), you will be provided with new copies of relevant material. The material that you still possess after the end of your term on a committee (e.g., your personal notes on applications you reviewed) must be destroyed by a secure process, e.g., by deleting electronic data files, shredding or burning paper, or arranging their return to NSERC.

5.4.3 Communication With Applicants

You must **not** enter into direct communication with applicants to obtain additional information on their proposals. If you require further information, contact the Program Officer. Refer all enquiries from applicants to NSERC; staff will act as liaison between the GSC and the applicants.

5.4.4 Code of Ethics and Business Conduct

NSERC has adopted a [Code of Ethics and Business Conduct for members of NSERC Standing and Advisory Committees](#), and a [Statement on Ethics for NSERC Selection Committees and Panels](#) (Appendix 2). These documents were designed to enhance public confidence in the integrity, objectivity and impartiality of its committee members. They require individuals on NSERC's standing and selection committees and panels to practice ethical behaviour and to disclose real, potential or apparent conflicts of interest, and to abide by any compliance measures that the President, or his/her delegate, determines as required.

Council By-Law II states that when an NSERC committee or panel assesses a specific application for an award, members who are directly or indirectly associated with the application must disclose their interest and follow [guidelines adopted by NSERC regarding conflicts of interest](#). Members of any NSERC committee or panel who stand to gain or lose financially, either in their personal capacity or by virtue of being an officer of any legal entity affected by a policy or financial decision of NSERC, must disclose their interest.

5.4.5 Privacy Act

In general, personal information means any information about an identifiable individual. Based on the Privacy Act, personal information provided to NSERC by applicants must be used only for the purpose of assessing NSERC applications, making funding decisions, and for certain related uses described to applicants by NSERC at the time that their personal information is collected. Remember that the use or disclosure of this information for any other purpose is illegal.



In most cases, NSERC must collect personal information directly from the individual to whom it relates. We may collect it from other sources, such as external reviewers, only as part of the formal peer review process. For this reason, GSCs must not use or consider information about an applicant that has been obtained in any other way, for example, by a GSC member by virtue of his/her involvement in non-NSERC activities.

An applicant has a legal right to access the information about him/her in NSERC files, including, for example, the full texts of referee reports or selection committee feedback. The *Privacy Act* allows NSERC to edit a peer reviewer's name from a review before disclosing it to the applicant; however, lists of Committee members are published regularly by NSERC, so applicants know who the committee members are.

It is important for committee members to adhere strictly to the guidelines set out in the [Conflict of Interest, Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure Declaration for Members of NSERC Selection Committees or Panels \(Form 251\)](#).

5.4.6 Canadian Human Rights Act

The activities of NSERC are subject to the *Canadian Human Rights Act*. The purpose of the Act is to give effect to the principle that every individual should have equal opportunity with other individuals to make for himself or herself the life that he or she is able and wishes to have, consistent with his or her duties and obligations as a member of society, without being hindered or prevented from doing so by discriminatory practices.

For all purposes of the Act, race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, marital status, family status, disability and conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted are prohibited grounds of discrimination. Where the grounds of discrimination is pregnancy or childbirth, the discrimination is deemed to be on the grounds of sex.

It is a discriminatory practice to deny a service to an individual or to differentiate adversely in relation to any individual in the provision of that service.

5.4.7 Official Languages Act

NSERC, like all other federal institutions, has a key role to play in the implementation of the *Official Languages Act*. NSERC has an obligation to ensure that:

- the public can communicate with and receive services from the agency in either official language; and
- the work environment can accommodate and is conducive to the effective use of both official languages by its employees and Council members.



NSERC ensures that its committees or panels and staff are fully aware of their obligations and rights regarding official languages by providing documentation on official languages to employees and Council members and by including relevant guidelines in the instructions to selection committees and panels.

In accordance with its active offer of bilingual service to the public, NSERC strives to appoint an appropriate number of experts with the appropriate language capabilities to serve on committees and panels. Selection committees and panels visiting francophone researchers must ensure that meetings can be conducted in French. If required, an NSERC staff member will accompany those visiting teams that foresee difficulties in this regard. Selection Committees must ensure that all applications receive a full and detailed evaluation regardless of the official language of presentation. On occasion this may entail consultation with NSERC staff to identify GSC members or external referees with adequate linguistic capability.

In accordance with its active offer of bilingual service to the public, upon request, NSERC will provide the service of simultaneous translation for the grant selection committees during the February meetings. Committee members who wish to make use of this service should advise NSERC well in advance of the meeting to allow for the preparations.

5.4.8 Policy on Integrity

The three federal granting agencies have defined their policies with respect to scientific integrity in the [*Tri-Council Policy Statement: Integrity in Research and Scholarship \(TCPS\)*](#). A researcher's signature on an application to NSERC commits the applicant to comply with a number of policies and guidelines, including the integrity policy.

NSERC expects the highest standards of integrity in the research and scholarship that it funds. Should panel members identify what appears to be a lack of scientific integrity during the evaluation process, they should discuss any such concerns with the Program Officer or senior NSERC staff at the earliest opportunity. Examples of problems include:

- any indication of falsification or fabrication of data, or of plagiarism; and
- inaccurate information on the application form (e.g., status of publications listed in personal data forms).

Allegations of scientific misconduct will be referred to the NSERC Research Ethics Coordinator (REC) who will determine an appropriate course of action. For matters that fall within the purview of the TCPS, such action may include referral of the allegation to the university with a request to carry out an inquiry or an investigation and provide a report to NSERC. The findings will remain confidential – no further information will be provided to Programs. For matters that fall outside the purview of the TCPS, the REC will inform the Program Officer, and where appropriate provide a recommendation for a



suitable follow-up action to address the issue (e.g., inclusion of a sentence in the comment to the applicant).

Such allegations **must not** be a consideration during the peer review process, nor should they be part of the committee's or panel's evaluation discussions.

When NSERC requests that the university carry out an investigation, a report must be provided to NSERC outlining the process followed, as well as the conclusion reached and details of any sanctions imposed. If misconduct is found to have occurred, the case will be referred to Council's Committee on Professional and Scientific Integrity (CPSI). The CPSI will make a recommendation to the President about whether NSERC will impose its own sanction(s).

The *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Integrity in Research and Scholarship* also covers integrity in the peer review process. Members of selection committees or panels *must* abide by the principle of not using information, concepts or data obtained through access to confidential applications without prior permission of the author. Any breach of confidentiality of this nature will be investigated and may result in the imposition of sanctions.

5.4.9 Procedures for Committee/Panel Members Under Investigation

Members of an NSERC committee or panel who find themselves in the position of having to respond to formal allegations of financial or professional impropriety **will not** participate in the work of the committee or panel while an investigation is under way.

5.4.10 Ethical and Other Considerations

NSERC requires that researchers adhere to a number of policies and guidelines governing research in particular areas:

- Research requiring the use of animals
- Research involving human subjects
- Research involving human pluripotent stem cells
- Research involving biohazards
- Research involving radioactive materials
- Research that potentially has an effect on the environment

These are described in the section "[Requirements for Certain Types of Research](#)" in the *NSERC Program Guide for Professors*.

It is the responsibility of NSERC staff with the support of administrators from research institutions to ensure that the researchers adhere to these guidelines. However, selection panels must alert NSERC to any potential ethical concerns or problems that are observed in information sessions or during the evaluation process. Here are some examples:



- Inadequate sensitivity to the potential concerns of human subjects and/or inadequate provisions for the participation of human subjects in experiments, as required by the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*
- Use of animals in experiments where the significance of the proposed research does not appear to justify either the use of animal subjects or the proposed experimental protocol
- Inadequate training of graduate students in the handling of hazardous chemicals or biological substances
- Potentially harmful effects on the environment or an inaccurate or incomplete assessment of these effects (whether or not they have been described in Appendix A, Form 101)
- Research that involves the use of human pluripotent stem cells where the applicant has not checked the “yes” box on page 1 of Form 101

If a committee or panel raises serious ethical concerns, they should be discussed immediately with NSERC staff to determine if there is a means of resolving any apparent problems quickly or if the release of any grant funds should be delayed pending resolution of the problem.