



Canadian Institutes
of Health Research

Instituts de recherche
en santé du Canada

Tips For Writing a Successful CIHR Grant Application or Request for Renewal



Canada

Canadian Institutes of Health Research
Room 97, 160 Elgin Street
Address Locator: 4809A
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0W9
Canada
www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada (2004)

Ottawa, July 2006

The following information should be helpful to you as you prepare future applications to CIHR:

1. Registration

YOU MUST REGISTER YOUR intention to submit a proposal to CIHR one month before the deadline for submission of the full proposal. Registration helps CIHR to arrange the best possible review of your application – we can use the information to recruit additional committee members, as required, and to select the most appropriate reviewers. This works well, however, only if there is minimal (if any) change in the information we receive at registration and in the full application. Please use the same name of principal applicant, title of the application, and requested committee in both documents. You may alter the summary, budget, suggested reviewers, and so on, but the application number you receive by registering is not a licence to then submit any application.

If, after registering, you do not submit a full application, please contact CIHR to tell us you are withdrawing from the competition.

2. Rating Scale

ALL GRANTS ARE RATED on a scale from 0 to 4.9, within descriptive categories ranging from “seriously flawed” to “outstanding.” Only applications rated 3.5 or higher are normally eligible for CIHR funding. Applications rated below 3.0 are flawed in some way, so that they do not represent a good investment of public funds. The range 3.0 to 3.5 is used for applications which, while technically and conceptually acceptable, are not considered to be a high priority for CIHR funding, perhaps because the topic is not considered relevant to an important health issue, or because the work proposed seems unlikely to yield major advances in knowledge, or because the approach is not particularly innovative.

Nevertheless, a proposal rated less than 3.0 may ultimately be fundable, may even be approved for funding in a resubmission, if the applicant(s) adequately addresses the reviewers’ concerns. Scientific Officers are asked to encourage applicants to resubmit these proposals if this is the case. Conversely, some proposals, though initially rated highly, may be limited in their originality, potential impact, and so on, that their rating is unlikely to be increased above the competition cut-off upon resubmission, even if the applicant(s) address the reviewers’ comments.

Therefore, take into account the Scientific Officers’ comments and the reviews, not just the rating of your proposal, while you are deciding whether or not to resubmit.

3. Resubmissions

YOU MAY RESUBMIT A revised proposal to a subsequent competition. You are allowed two pages to respond to previous reviews (“rebuttal pages”) but your comments must stand alone; that is, committee members do not have access to previous reviews.

Some applicants choose not to use the rebuttal pages, preferring not to identify the application as a resubmission. Nevertheless, the committees, upon re-review of an application, do frequently consider whether the applicant has satisfactorily addressed the concerns that were previously raised, and are generally favourably disposed toward an applicant who has attempted to do so. However, doing so does not guarantee that the application will be funded the second time around, or even that it will be rated higher than before. The resubmission is in a brand new

competition, is being compared to a new group of competing applications, and may have been assigned to different reviewers than previously.

Although CIHR does not enforce a “three strikes, you’re out” policy, applications generally reach a “stable level of assessment” by their third time around. Therefore, it is wise to consider major changes or a totally different project rather than submit the same application again.

4. Adherence to Format Guidelines

IN EVERY COMPETITION, we receive applications that do not conform to the format guidelines stated in the application form. For example, margins are inadequate, font is too small, pages are too numerous, figure and table captions contain information that should be included in the proposal text, and appendices are included that are not allowed. CIHR may reject your application if it does not conform to the guidelines, so read and follow them carefully.

Committee members complain about applicants who do not follow the guidelines. Such applicants are often perceived as attempting to get an edge in the competition by including more material than other applicants are allowed, and this can be construed negatively. It is in your interest to follow the specified format guidelines to most favourably dispose the reviewers toward your application.

5. Committee Assignments

CIHR INITIALLY SENDS APPLICATIONS to the committee that the applicant indicates as their first choice. When an applicant does not indicate a committee, a member of CIHR’s scientific staff selects the committee to which the application is assigned. The Chairperson and Scientific Officer of the committee then assign reviewers, both internal and external (where necessary), for each application they are to consider. If they believe their committee does not have the expertise to evaluate a given proposal, they will return it to CIHR staff for reassignment to a more suitable committee. Often, but not always, this will be the applicant’s second-choice committee. If the committee is the correct one but no current committee member is capable of reviewing the application, a “teleconference reviewer” may be recruited to review the application with the committee.

CIHR will notify applicants, in advance of the review, of any change in committee from that preferred by the applicant. If you are uncertain which committee is most appropriate to review your application, you should consult CIHR staff to discuss this before completing your application.

6. Budgets – The Need for Justification

AFTER RATING A PROPOSAL, the committee recommends the budget required to carry out the work proposed, from a zero base. This is why you must explain and justify all items in the budget you request.

- If you include a need for research personnel and trainees, state their roles and explain why you require the level (in terms of qualifications and salary) that you are requesting.
- Itemize the expendables and services; for example, number and cost of animals, nature and amounts of reagents, numbers of subjects, or number and cost of printing survey instruments. For travel requests, indicate the purpose of the trip(s), who will travel, and their destination(s).

- Itemize your equipment requirements, with price quotations attached as required. Describe why you need the equipment and what else is available. Attach supporting letters from institutional officials that attest that the equipment is not currently available at your institution.

7. Co-applicants

INDIVIDUALS WHOSE PARTICIPATION IS required for the proposal to succeed (but not necessarily including technicians and trainees) should be included as co-applicants. It is not unusual to hear a committee say that they would have been more comfortable if a named collaborator had been a co-applicant of the proposal instead. This would assure the committee of the feasibility of the proposed work, since, as a co-applicant, the individual makes a firmer commitment to ensure that the work is completed.

Describe the roles of all co-applicants in your proposal. Note that the co-applicants' time commitments should be commensurate with their role in the research. For example, would one hour a week really be a meaningful commitment? Committees have been known to wonder if names were added simply to increase the number of pages allowed in the application!

Remember to include the signatures of all applicants— principal and co-applicants on or with Page 1 of the application form. These signatures signify that the applicant(s) undertake(s) certain responsibilities in regard to the application and subsequent grant, if awarded (see Grants and Awards Guide, Section 1: CIHR General Grants and Awards Policies, "The Meaning of Signatures on Application Forms"). CIHR does not release funding until it obtains all signatures.

Note that co-applicants, other than research associates and trainees, cannot receive a salary from this or any other CIHR grant (though they are permitted to hold a CIHR award while involved in a funded project).

8. Ethics

YOU DO NOT NEED TO include copies of certificates from local ethics committees indicating approval of your proposed research with your application. It is your local institution's responsibility to release the project funds to you only after they obtain the ethics committee's approval. Nevertheless, you must still indicate on Page 1 of the application whether human or animal subjects are involved and whether containment will be required in the research. If you do not include this information, CIHR will follow up with the local authorities to see if you have sought ethics approval or have the required facilities respectively.

In addition, committees may raise ethical concerns of their own about a proposal. When this occurs, CIHR raises the issue with the applicant and the local review board, following the competition, to ensure it was considered in the ethical review of the proposal.

CIHR has recently adopted guidelines entitled "Human Pluripotent Stem Cell Research: Guidelines for CIHR funded Research which can be found on CIHR's website www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca under Publications, Ethics, Stem Cell Research. If your application involves this type of research, this should be indicated on Page 1 of the Research Module. If in the future, your project evolves toward the use of these cells, we request that you inform CIHR so that it can be reviewed by the Stem Cell Oversight Committee (SCOG) as soon as possible. SCOG approval is required before human stem cell research can proceed.

Regarding privacy and confidentiality aspects of your proposed research, “CIHR's Best Practices for Protecting Privacy in Health Research (September 2005)” may help you to anticipate and address these issues in your proposal. You can access this document at www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29072.html. For background information, consult “Privacy Best Practices 2005-2007 Initial Implementation Phase” at www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29138.html.

If you have succeeded in obtaining a CIHR grant:

9. Attention to Renewal Dates

YOU MUST APPLY FOR renewal of an operating grant six months before your current grant's expiry date in order to maintain uninterrupted funding. To assist you, the application date for renewal of the grant is indicated on each Authorization for Funding. As well, CIHR will send you a reminder notice one to two months before your renewal application is due.

There are potential penalties for both early and late renewals. In the case of early applications, if the applicant is unsuccessful, the currently held grant will be terminated on the date for which funding of a successful grant in that competition would have begun. If CIHR receives a renewal application after the renewal date (and a postponement of the renewal date or extension of the grant has not been approved), the application will be considered a “new” application.

CIHR will consider requests for postponement of the renewal date, without additional funding, for periods up to one year, provided that the applicant makes the request prior to the date that the renewal application is due. One may, of course, deliberately submit a renewal application early; for example, if they believe their current funding is inadequate and believe they will achieve a more favourable level of funding upon re-review.

10. Acknowledgment of CIHR in Publications

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT CIHR grant recipients be accountable for the public funding they receive. If CIHR is to maintain or increase its level of funding, the benefits of its funding must be apparent to Canadians. CIHR grant recipients must always acknowledge CIHR's funding support, whether the research is presented at a scientific meeting or at a news conference, or published in a scientific journal or as a media report. The absence of proper acknowledgment is noticed—reviewers have asked whether publications where CIHR's support is not acknowledged be considered as formally reflecting progress on the grant.

If you have significant findings that are about to be published in a scientific journal which may be picked up by the media or are planning any type of public announcement of research results from work funded by CIHR, wholly or in partnership, it is also important that you alert the CIHR Communications office in advance for assistance and to ensure that the support of CIHR is acknowledged.

For more information about the competition process, visit our website at www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca.