

Fellowship Committee Guidelines

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The Rebecca L Cooper Medical Research Foundation (“*The Foundation*”) appoints a Fellowship Advisory Committee (“*FAC*”) to review fellowship applications for the purpose of preparing a shortlist of candidates to be considered by the directors of The Foundation. This document sets out important information for committee members relating to:

- the structure and membership of the FAC;
- the roles and responsibilities of committee members; and
- the assessment process and award of the fellowship.

Structure and Membership of the FAC

Chairperson

A director of the Foundation with experience in academia and research, the Chairperson (“*Chair*”), oversees the peer review process. The primary duties of the Chair are to ensure that the process of peer review is managed in accordance with the guidelines outlined in this document, and where appropriate, to facilitate discussion of the applications for the purpose of preparing a final ranked list of applicants to be reviewed by the directors of the Foundation.

Heads of Review

For each of the Foundation’s nominated areas of funding support, a Head of Review with relevant expertise is appointed:

- to advise the Foundation on matters pertaining to the applications within his/her area of expertise;
- to source experts within his/her field of expertise to join the FAC to review applications; and
- to provide advice to the Foundation on its granting- and research-related activities.

FAC members

FAC members (“*reviewers*”) are experienced researchers with expertise the Foundation’s nominated areas of funding support. The Foundation aspires to balance representation on the FAC with respect to:

- administering institutions;
- state and territory; and
- gender.

FAC members are assigned to review a maximum of ten applications that are approximately four A4 pages in length. Each application is reviewed by three FAC members, where a minimum of one reviewer has expertise relevant to the applicant’s area of research. Reviewers are, however, required to review applications across the seven disciplines of medicine supported by The Foundation. A balanced perspective is desirable since the focus of the review is on the applicant’s knowledge, skills and research vision, rather than the technical aspects of his/her research program.

Any FAC member who serves on the committee for three consecutive years will be provided at least one ‘rest year’ before being invited again.

Process Overview

1. Receipt and processing of applications.
2. Heads of Review nominate members to join FAC.
3. Invitations sent to potential FAC members.
4. FAC formed and members nominate any conflicts of interest they may have with applicants.
5. Applications are allocated to FAC members for review, with care taken to minimise conflicts of interest.
6. Six week review period.
7. Standardisation and ranking of scores by the Foundation's Executive Officer.
8. Funding allocation meeting (directors and Chair of FAC to attend).
9. Announcement of Fellowship recipient.

Peer Review Guidelines

The Foundation has based these guidelines on the guidelines set by the NHMRC in its publication *A guide to NHMRC peer review*. These guidelines contain important information about the standards and best practice for the conduct of peer review.

The Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research describes peer review as the impartial and independent assessment of research by others working in the same or a related field. In the context of reviewing fellowship applications, peer review involves the assessment of personal merit and potential of applicants by individuals with knowledge and expertise appropriate for the applications they are reviewing and who are in the more senior stages of their research career.

It is expected that reviewers:

- are fair and timely in their review;
- act in confidence and do not disclose the content or outcome of any process in which they are involved;
- declare all conflicts of interest (“COIs”);
- do not introduce considerations that are not relevant to the review criteria;
- do not take undue or calculated advantage of knowledge obtained during the peer review process;
- ensure that they are informed about, and comply with, the criteria to be applied;
- give proper consideration to research *that challenges or changes accepted ways of thinking*;
- and
- make themselves aware of relevant policies and procedures, prior to their involvement in the review process.

Principles of Peer Review

The Principles of Peer Review outlined by the NHMRC adopted by the Foundation include:

1. Fairness

Peer review processes are designed to ensure that peer review is fair and seen to be fair by all involved. Peer review participants have an obligation to ensure that each application is judged consistently and objectively on its own merits, against assessment criteria. Peer reviewers must be fair and impartial and not introduce irrelevant issues into consideration.

2. Transparency

Key dates and all relevant material, guidelines, guides to applicants and fellowship announcements will be published on the Foundation's website. The Foundation will publicly recognise the contribution of participants in the peer review process on its website.

3. Independence

The FAC Chair is independent and not involved in the peer review of any application. The Chair acts to ensure that the Foundation's processes are followed including adherence to the guidelines set out in this document.

4. Appropriateness and Balance

The FAC is balanced to ensure that reviewers have appropriate experience and expertise to review applications; the FAC is representative of gender, geography and institutions; and that conflicts of interest are minimised.

5. Research Community Participation

Persons who have relevant expertise are asked to participate in the peer review process, when possible.

6. Confidentiality

All participants involved in the peer review process act in confidence and do not disclose any matter regarding applications under review to people who are not part of the process. The Foundation will endeavour to protect the identity of FAC members during the assessment process, unless required to release such information by relevant legislation. When this occurs, it will be done so following discussion with the individuals concerned. Following the assessment process, a list of FAC members will be published on the Foundation's website.

7. Impartiality

FAC members declare all interests and matters that may, or may not be perceived to affect his/her judgement on particular applications. The Fellowship Committee Chair manages COIs to ensure that no one with a significant conflict is involved in decision making of relevant applications.

8. Quality and Excellence

The Foundation strives to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its processes and endeavours to minimise the workload of FAC members.

9. Integrity

FAC members are to exemplify integrity in all involvement with the peer review process and must act in good faith in the best interests of the Foundation and the research community for a proper purpose. This includes, but is not limited to the maintenance of absolute confidentiality and thus, abstaining from improper use of their involvement (or information obtained from their involvement) to gain an advantage for themselves or any person, or to cause detriment to the Foundation.

Contact with Applicants

Applicants must not contact Fellowship Committee members. Such contact must be reported to the Chair may exclude their applications from further consideration. Similarly, people directly engaged with the peer review of an application must not contact applicants.

Conflicts of Interest (COIs)

The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) defines a COIs as arising "...in any situation where *personal, financial or other interest has the potential to compromise, or have the appearance of compromising, professional judgement and the ability to make unbiased decisions...*".

A COI arises in any situation in which a participant in a peer review process has an interest which may influence, or be perceived to influence his/her assessment of an application. The perception of a COI is as important as any actual COI. The Foundation is committed to ensuring that COI are dealt with consistently, transparently and with rigour.

The peer review process requires applications to be reviewed by people with expertise in that particular field. This is a privilege which carries an obligation on the part of reviewers to act in good faith, in an open and sensible manner and in accordance with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and the Commonwealth Grant Guidelines and best practice in peer review.

The perception that a COI exists is also a serious matter and raises concerns about the integrity of individuals or the management practices of the institution. Researchers frequently have a COI that cannot be avoided. Decision making processes in research often need expert advice, and the pool of experts in a field can be so small that all the experts have some link with the matter under decision. An individual researcher should therefore expect to be conflicted from time to time and be ready to acknowledge the COIs and make disclosures as appropriate.

COIs may fall into the broad domains of:

- involvement with the application under review
- collaborations
- working relationships
- professional relationships and interest
- social relationships or interests
- teaching or supervisory relationships
- financial relationships or interests
- other interests or relationships

Managing COIs

SAC members will be asked to declare any actual or perceived COIs. If an individual thinks that he/she may have a COIs with an application, sufficient detail about the nature of the (perceived) COI should be provided to enable the Foundation to promptly assess each case.

Failure to Declare COIs

Failure to declare a COI will result in termination of the appointment to the SAC for the relevant committee member.

Potential COI Situations

The following *Conflict of Interest Situations* table outlines matters that may need to be considered when deciding where potential conflicts lie and provides some examples of specific situations where COIs in the peer review process apply.

The table is intended to be for guidance only. It is representative of COIs situations rather than definitive, as each situation is different and needs to be considered on its merits. The table is

provided to assist SAC members in identifying the types of circumstances in which COIs might arise, but is not intended to be a checklist.

Situation	Explanation and Examples	Conflict level*
Contribution to the application under review	You are a named participant on the application under review	High
	You have had discussions/input into the study design or research proposal of this application	High
Collaborations	You have actively collaborated on publications (co-authorship), pending applications, existing Foundation or other grants	High
	You have an indirect collaboration e.g. collaborating co-worker, member of a research or discussion group, co-author of a large multi-author paper where involvement was minimal, provided cells/animals etc. to applicants without financial gain or exchange	Obtain ruling
	You are planning, or have been approached to be involved in a future grant application or other future collaborative relationship with this applicant(s)	Obtain ruling
Working relationship	You have the same employer or are part of the same organisation	Usually high
	You are working in the same department (or equivalent) within an organisation	High
	You work in the same locality but for a different organisation	Obtain ruling
Professional relationships and Interests	You are also a member of the same scientific advisory committee, review board, exam board, trial committee etc.	Obtain ruling
	You or your organisation are affiliated with the applicant's	Obtain ruling

	<p>organisation</p> <p>You or your organisation is affiliated or associated with organisations such as pharmaceutical companies etc.</p>	Obtain ruling
Social relationship and/or Interests	<p>There is a personal/social relationship between you, your partner or other member of your family and the applicant</p> <p>You have a personal / social relationship with the applicant's partner or other member of their family</p>	<p>Usually high</p> <p>Usually high</p>
Teaching or supervisory relationship	For either undergraduate or postgraduate studies, you have taught or supervised the applicant; you co-supervised the applicant; your own research was supervised by the applicant	High
Financial interest in the Application	<p>You have an associated patent pending; supply goods and services; improved access to facilities; provide cells/animals or similar to the applicant</p> <p>You receive research funding or other support from a company and the research to be reviewed may impact upon the company</p>	<p>Usually high</p> <p>Usually high</p>
Other interests or situations	You have a previous or pending dispute (may require consideration of events earlier than the last five years)	High

*The Foundation will exercise judgement when deciding the level of conflict

Assessment Guidelines

Please familiarise yourself with [2019 Fellowship Application Guidelines](#) on our website prior to reviewing applications.

You are to give each application an integrated single score out of 100. In arriving at this score consideration should be given to three weighted criteria:

1. **Future vision (45%)** – Does the applicant have a clear and feasible vision of their research and career direction?

2. **Personal Achievements / Track Record (35%)** – Has the applicant displayed the necessary knowledge, skills and attributes to implement the vision (including a history of raising funding, research output, research quality etc.)
3. **Research significance (20%)**

Please note that the Foundation supports applications from individuals wishing to undertake the Fellowship on a part-time basis. When reviewing applications for a part-time Fellowship, please stipulate what your view on the minimum %FTE required to ensure sufficient productivity.