Rebecca L. Cooper
Medical Research Foundation

Al & Val Rosenstrauss Fellowship Committee Guidelines

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The Rebecca L Cooper Medical Research Foundation ("*The Foundation*") appoints a Fellowship Advisory Committee ("*FAC*") to review applications for The Al & Val Rosenstrauss Fellowship (*"The Fellowship"*) 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 Foundation's funding priorities;
- the assessment process and award of The Fellowship;
- the structure and membership of the FAC; and
- the roles and responsibilities of committee members.

Foundation Funding Priorities

The Foundation has identified the following three funding goals:

1. Fund research with a focus in one of the following disease areas:

a. Brain Sciences: Psychiatry or Neurology (excluding Dementias, Motor Neuron Disease, Psychology and Cognitive Interventions, and COVID-19)
b. Endocrinology (excluding Diabetes and COVID-19)
c. Geriatrics (excluding Dementias and COVID-19)
d. Lung Disease (other than Cancer and COVID-19)
e. Rheumatology (excluding impact of COVID-19)
f. Vision Sciences (excluding impact of COVID-19)
g. Dermatology (excluding Skin Cancer and COVID 19)

2. Fund research which will enhance understanding of the biological mechanisms of the disease:
The Foundation is particularly committed to funding discovery research that will increase understanding of the biological mechanisms causing diseases within the areas of support listed above. The Foundation will also consider funding translational research that is clearly based on an understanding of disease mechanisms and biology and has the potential to change clinical practice for treating a disease or its symptoms in its nominated areas of research interests. Clinical research is not a funding priority for the Foundation. (For further definition of Discovery/Translational/Clinical research classifications, please refer to the Assessment Guidelines on page 3)

3. Fund talented researchers who show signs of becoming leaders within their area of expertise
The Foundation's objective is to identify up and coming leaders with a strong research vision and the aptitude to drive a long and impactful research career. The Foundation is looking to invest in a talented researcher who will build their research program over the next five years and beyond.

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Assessment Guidelines

Please familiarise yourself with Al & Val Rosenstrauss Fellowship Application Guidelines on our website prior to reviewing applications.

You are to score each application on the following three dimensions using the Scoring Rubric below. The three scores will be summed to form a single score out of 100.

1. **Future vision (score out of 45)** – Does the applicant have a clear and feasible vision of their research and career direction?
2. **Personal Achievements / Track Record (score out of 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 (score out of 20)**

Scoring Rubric

Future Vision

41-45	Exceptional	Clear and concise articulation of all points below: 1. Articulates career progression goals 2. Vision for 5+ year program of research that is multidimensional (not just a description of a research project) 3. Evidence of innovation 4. Big-picture thinking; not miniature of methodology (not bogged down in complexity)
36-40	Outstanding	Clearly addresses all points below, though some in less detail: 1. Articulates career progression goals 2. Vision for 5+ year program of research that is multidimensional (not just a description of a research project) 3. Evidence of innovation 4. Big-picture thinking; not miniature of methodology (not bogged down in complexity)
31-35	Above expectations	Addresses most points below: 1. Articulates career progression goals 2. Vision for 5+ year program of research that is multidimensional (not just a description of a research project) 3. Evidence of innovation 4. Big-picture thinking; not miniature of methodology (not bogged down in complexity)
26-30	At expectations	Some detail on most points below: 1. Articulates career progression goals 2. Vision for 5+ year program of research that is multidimensional (not just a description of a research project) 3. Evidence of innovation 4. Big-picture thinking; not miniature of methodology (not bogged down in complexity)

21-25	Below expectations	Vaguely articulates points below: 1. Articulates career progression goals 2. Vision for 5+ year program of research that is multidimensional (not just a description of a research project) 3. Evidence of innovation 4. Big-picture thinking; not miniature of methodology (not bogged down in complexity)
11-20	Poor	Very limited description of future goals.
1-10	Missing response/ misguided	No future vision articulated

Personal Achievements and Track Record

31-35	Exceptional	Applicant is achieving above their cohort and is a recognised leader in their field. 1. Possesses exceptional/unique knowledge and skills required to execute vision. 2. Has established strong mentors and collaborators. 3. Strong evidence of independence and leadership. Not resting on the achievements of their supervisor/group. 4. Strong evidence of research feasibility. Demonstrates realistic project plan/timeline, access to required resources/facilities and preliminary findings/previous data to support proposal. 5. Evidence of competitive funding 6. Strong involvement in the research community in roles such as editorial boards, ethics committees, review panels and professional bodies. 7. Has a strong record of mentoring and supervising students. 8. Outstanding research output; Publishes high-impact research in top-tier journals. Holds prominent author positions. 9. Evidence of excellent academic/professional recognition; Has received prestigious awards and/or invitations to present at conferences.
26-30	Outstanding	Applicant is near top of cohort and is an emerging leader in their field. 1. Demonstrates strong depth of knowledge and skills required to execute vision. 2. Has established appropriate mentors and collaborations. 3. On track to independence. Emerging as strong leader in their field. Has achievements that are distinct from their prior supervisor/group. 4. Good research feasibility. Demonstrates consideration of the resources and timeline required and provides preliminary findings that support proposal. 5. Some evidence of competitive funding

		6. Involved in the research community in roles such as review committees, editorial boards, and professional bodies. 7. Has a solid record of mentoring and supervising students. 8. Strong research output – Some publications in top-tier journals with strong author positions. 9. Evidence of strong academic/professional recognition. Has received notable awards or invitations to speak at reputable conferences.
21-25	Above expectations	Strong record of achievement and solid reputation as expert in their field. 1. Has ability to execute vision. Demonstrates appropriate knowledge and skills. 2. May require further growth of mentorship and collaborations. 3. Evidence of some leadership and achievements that stand apart from their supervisor/group. 4. Evidence of feasibility of proposed research is present but could benefit from more refined planning or stronger preliminary data. 5. Some-little evidence of competitive funding 6. Some involvement in the research community in roles such as review committees, editorial boards, and professional bodies. 7. Has some experience mentoring and supervising students. 8. Solid research output – Publishes in reputable journals. Author positions may vary, but overall output is solid and growing. 9. Evidence of recognition - Has received awards or invitations to speak at conferences, but may be more minor or limited in scope.
16-20	At expectations	Good achievement record, but still reliant support of group leader 1. Demonstrates knowledge and skills in area of expertise. 2. Mentorship and collaborations limited. 3. Has some leadership responsibilities but work still closely tied to supervisor. 4. Evidence of feasibility could be improved with a more developed research plan or more preliminary data. 5. Little-no evidence of competitive funding. 6. Limited involvement in the research community in roles such as review committees, editorial boards, and professional bodies. 7. Limited experience mentoring or supervising students. 8. Limited research output – Has some publications, but may lack high-impact journals or prominent author positions.

		9. Limited recognition - Limited awards or invitations to speak at conferences.
11-15	Below expectations	Group member still reliant support of group leader 1. Insufficient knowledge, skills, mentorship or collaborations to lead research proposal. 2. Carrying out research of supervisor/group. 3. Questionable feasibility of proposed research plan and lacks preliminary findings to support research proposal. 4. No competitive funding 5. Little involvement in the research community in roles such as review committees, editorial boards, and professional bodies. 6. Poor research output – few publications, in low-impact journals. Author contribution is minimal.
1-10	Poor/missing response	Has gaps in information provided which makes it impossible to determine feasibility of research or provides low confidence in the researcher's capability to achieve stated goals.

Research Significance

16-20	Exceptional	1. Likely to have a paradigm-shifting and ground-breaking impact with long-term implications for both knowledge and health outcomes. The research is poised to offer novel insights or innovative approaches that could redefine the field. 2. Identifies significant gaps in knowledge or unresolved questions and demonstrates a strong, innovative approach to filling these gaps. The proposal outlines how it will advance the field in meaningful, novel ways, showing clear potential for high-impact results.
11-15	Above expectations	1. Strong potential for significant advancement in knowledge, practices or health outcomes. While the findings may not radically alter the field, they will contribute substantial new knowledge or enhance current methods, practices, or technologies, with clear, actionable outcomes. 2. Identifies significant gaps in the field and provides a clear, though perhaps less detailed, explanation of how the research will address these gaps. The approach is reasonable and shows potential to advance understanding, though there may be room for further clarification or development of ideas.
5-10	At expectations	1. Contributes to existing knowledge or practice with moderate impact. The research provides valuable insights that enhance understanding or refine existing methods that may open avenues for further research. The potential for broad application is limited. 2. Identifies some gaps or limitations in the current knowledge but does so in a general or vague

		manner. The approach for addressing these gaps is not clearly addressed.
0-5	Below expectations / missing response	The significance of the research is unclear or poorly articulated

Classifying the Nature of the Research

The Foundation is interested in understanding more about the areas of research that the applicants are working in. You will be asked to allocate each application that you review to one of the following three categories funded by the Foundation:

1. **Discovery Research** - seeks to understand the biological processes that underpin health and disease at the molecular, cellular, organ system and whole-body levels. It may be conducted in vitro, in vivo and/or in silico.
2. **Translational Research** - process of using research findings to improve health and wellbeing. This process can include developing new treatments, creating evidence-based guidelines, and implementing new policies.
3. **Clinical Research** – cohort studies and clinical trials done in patients.

Assessment of Career Disruption

Applications may include a Statement of Impact describing the impact of interruptions (pregnancy, major illness/injury, carer's responsibilities) on research output/productivity. This Statement of Impact is to be considered as part of your assessment of Track Record relative to opportunity.

Reviewer Comments

Please note that feedback is not provided to applicants. Your comments may be taken into consideration by the Foundation's Directors in making award decisions. Your comments need not be extensive, but may highlight:

1. anything about the application that is noteworthy (good or concerning);
2. if the research is of particular importance; and/or
3. whether the application is the best application in the allotment that you have reviewed.

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 in 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.

Reviewers are assigned to review a approximately ten applications that are approximately four A4 pages in length. Each application is reviewed by three reviewers, 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.

Process Overview

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

Peer Review Guidelines

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 below have been adapted from the NHMRC's Principles of Peer Review.

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; is representative of gender, geography and institutions; and is managed to minimise conflicts of interest.

5. Research Community Participation
Persons who have relevant expertise are asked to participate in 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 reviewers 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 reviewers will be published on the Foundation's website.

7. Impartiality
Reviewers declare all interests and matters that may, or may not be perceived to affect his/her judgement on particular applications. The FAC 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 reviewers.

9. Integrity
Reviewers 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 reviewers. Such contact must be reported to the Chair may result in their application being excluded 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 COIs are dealt with consistently, transparently and with rigour.

Peer review 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 Foundation recognises that 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
Reviewers will be asked to declare any actual or perceived COIs. If an individual thinks that he/she may have a COI 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 FAC.

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 COI situations rather than definitive, as each situation is different and needs to be considered on its merits. The table is provided to assist reviewers 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. You are working in the same department (or equivalent) within an organisation. You work in the same locality but for a different organisation.	Usually high High Obtain ruling
Professional relationships and Interests	You are also a member of the same scientific advisory committee, review board, exam board, trial committee etc. You or your organisation are affiliated with the applicant's organisation. You or your organisation is affiliated or associated with organisations such as pharmaceutical companies etc.	Obtain ruling Obtain ruling Obtain ruling
Social relationship and/or Interests	There is a personal/social relationship between you, your partner or other member of your family and the applicant. You have a personal / social relationship with the applicant’s partner or other member of their family.	Usually high Usually high
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	You have an associated patent pending; supply goods and services; improved access to facilities; provide cells/animals or similar to the applicant. You receive research funding or other support from a company and the research to be reviewed may impact upon the company.	Usually high Usually high
Other interests or situations	You have a previous or pending dispute (may require consideration of events earlier that the last five years).	High

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