Scientific Advisory Committee

Contents

The Rebecca L Cooper Medical Research Foundation (The Foundation) appoints a Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) to review and assess grant applications for the purpose of assisting the directors to make grant allocation decisions. This document sets out important information for committee members relating to:

- the structure and membership of the SAC;
- the roles and responsibilities of committee members; and
- the process of grant assessment and allocation.

Structure and Membership of the SAC

The SAC is comprised of researchers who have previously received grants from the Foundation. The expectation is that each SAC member (reviewer) will assess up to ten applications for research grants with each application being approximately five A4 pages in length, within his/her nominated area of expertise. The number of reviewers assigned to each area of research supported by The Foundation will reflect the number of applications received in each area of nominated research.

The Foundation aspires to ensure:

- composition of the SAC is comprised of both experienced and new SAC members by retaining approximately 60 per cent of members from the previous year;
- at least one 'rest year' is provided for a member that has served more than three years consecutively;
- broad state and territory representation;
- representation from diverse (location and size) administering institutions;
- where possible, a balanced representation of gender; and
- relevant expertise is included as dictated by application demand.

A Chairperson (Chair), appointed by the Foundation's board of directors, will manage the peer review process. The Chair will typically be a director of the Foundation with experience in Academia and Research. To ensure the Chair is impartial he/she will not participate in the assessment of applications. 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. The independent Chair will ensure that each application receives fair and equitable review by reviewers.

Granting Process Overview

1. Invitation sent to potential SAC members.
2. SAC formed from consenting SAC members.
3. Receipt and processing of applications.
4. Nomination of Conflicts of Interest – a list of applicants will be circulated to SAC members. SAC members nominate any applicants with whom they may have a conflict of interest.
5. Assignment of applications to SAC members – up to ten applications will be allocated to each reviewer, with care taken to minimise conflicts of interest.
6. Assessment of applications.
7. Standardisation and ranking of scores by Executive Officer.
8. Funding allocation meeting (directors and Chair to attend).
9. Announcement of grants.

Guidelines for SAC members

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 funding research grant applications, peer review involves the assessment of scientific or technical merit of applications by individuals (peers) with knowledge and expertise appropriate for the applications they are reviewing.

It is expected that SAC members:
- 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, do not permit personal prejudice to influence the peer review;
- process, and 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;
- do not agree to participate in peer review outside their area of expertise;
- 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.

Applications will be subject to scrutiny and evaluation by individuals who have appropriate knowledge of the fields covered in the application. Peer reviewers should ensure that their assessments are accurate and honest, and that all claims are capable of being verified.

2. Transparency

Key dates and all relevant material, guidelines, guides to applicants and grant 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 SAC 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 Foundation endeavours to ensure that each area of research has the required balance of experience and expertise to assess applications whilst also ensuring conflicts of interest are dealt with appropriately. The Foundation uses also endeavours to ensure that the SAC is constituted to ensure an appropriate representation of gender, geography and large and small institutions.

5. Research Community Participation

Persons holding Foundation grants willingly make themselves available to participate in in the peer review process whenever possible.

6. Confidentiality

All participants in peer review 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 SAC 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 SAC members will be published on the Foundation's website.

7. Impartiality

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

8. Quality and Excellence

The Foundation will strive to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the process and endeavour to minimise the workload of committee members.

9. Integrity

SAC 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 SAC 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

The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) defines a Conflict of Interest (CoI) 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 conflict of interest (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.

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 conflict 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 Conflicts of Interest
SAC members 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) conflict should be provided to enable the Foundation to promptly assess each case.

Failure to Declare Conflicts of Interest
Failure to declare a CoI will result in termination of the appointment to the SAC for the relevant committee member.

Potential Conflicts of Interest 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 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 organisation	Obtain ruling
	You or your organisation is affiliated or associated with organisations such as pharmaceutical companies etc.	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	Usually high
	You have a personal / social relationship with the applicant's partner or other member of their family	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	Usually high
	You receive research funding or other support from a company and the research to be reviewed may impact upon the company	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

Assessment Guidelines

Each grant will be given an integrated single score out of 100. In arriving at this score consideration should be given to:

1. Innovation (40%)
2. Feasibility (50%)
3. Track record (10%)

Please refer to appendices A and B for a copy of the "Grant Application Guidelines" and "the Grant Proposal Template", respectively. Please also refer to the Foundation's Ethos Statement below for information regarding the Foundation's philosophy and priorities.

Ethos Statement

The charter of The Rebecca L. Cooper Medical Research Foundation is to advance, promote and encourage medical research, throughout Australia. The Foundation prioritises areas of medical research that are not widely funded by other funding bodies, and currently supports the following six areas of medical research:

1. Brain Sciences: Psychiatry and Neurology
2. Endocrinology and Diabetes
3. Geriatrics
4. Lung Disease (other than Cancer)
5. Rheumatology
6. Vision Sciences

The Foundation strives to ensure that its funds are directed towards high quality research and high quality researchers.

High quality research is considered to be research that not only has scientific rigour and feasibility, but that will fundamentally benefit the world we live in or significantly improve our understanding of the disease/condition. This includes basic science, applied research and translational research.

High quality researchers are individuals who have excelled or show potential to excel in their chosen area of medical research. The Foundation supports researchers at all stages in their career. The Foundation additionally seeks to create opportunities for less established researchers who show potential, to secure the necessary funding to propel their careers and their research. Specifically, the PhD scholarships and fellowships awarded by the Foundation are reserved for researchers in the earlier stages of their career.

Grants provided by the Foundation are awarded to support the direct costs of research, typically tangibles including laboratory equipment and consumables. The Foundation does not support indirect costs and would not normally pay salary costs for those already employed in salaried positions. The Foundation provides relatively modest grants which are frequently used to:

- top up funding in instances where other funding for a project has already been secured; or

- to leverage additional funding for a project.

Applicants employed by not-for-profit and non-commercial institutions are prioritised.

The Foundation values input from the medical research community in its endeavour to achieve the outcomes detailed above. The Foundation invites the expertise and contributions of the research community to inform its funding decisions, improve its operations and guide its future direction.

FAQs

What should I do if an application has significantly used additional writing space beyond the maximum allowance. Does this preclude the application from being assessed?

Applications exceeding the page limit are disqualified.

How do I assess an incomplete application?

The application must be judged on what was given to ensure that we are not influencing the process.

Is any weighting to be preferentially given to early career researchers (ECRs) ?

No preferential weighting is to be given. Your role as an SAC member is to assess what is presented. You do, however, have the opportunity to include a comment with your score which will be provided to the directors.

Must applicants be medical practitioners?

There is no requirement for an applicant for a grant to be a medical practitioner so long as the applicant has a proven research track record in the area of medical science.

Are PhD students eligible to apply for grants?

No, PhD students are not eligible to apply for grants. Only post-doctoral researchers including those having completed a PhD or equivalent (such as an MBBS or MD with an established track record in research) are eligible to apply.

Appendix A

Grant Application Guidelines

Researchers working in Australia in the medical research fields supported by The Rebecca L. Cooper Medical Research Foundation (*The Foundation*), are invited to apply for grants to support research commencing in the calendar year 2017. Applications for grants up to a maximum value of $25,000 (*ex GST*) will be considered.

The six nominated areas of medical research supported by the Foundation: 1. Brain Sciences: psychiatry and neurology; 2. Endocrinology and Diabetes; 3. Geriatrics; 4. Lung Disease (other than cancer); 5. Rheumatology; and 6. Vision Sciences.

How to Apply

Applications open **1 August 2016** and close at **5pm EST on 1 September 2016.** Applications must be submitted via the Online Application Form www.cooperfoundation.org.au/form.

Please ensure you have the following information prior to filling out the online form:
- Bank account details of the research institution to which successful grants will be paid.
- Contact details for the chief investigator.
- Contact details for the administrative/grants officer.
- Research details (research category, project title, amount sought *ex GST*, use of funds and total cost of the project).

The Online Form will also ask you to attach the following documents:
- **A Grant Proposal saved as a PDF –** To assist you in preparing this proposal, a word template can be downloaded from the website. This proposal must include three sections: 1) Cover Page; 2) Grant Proposal; and 3) Biographical Sketch of Chief Investigator.
- **Publication(s) that have resulted from previous Foundation funding –** This only applies to previous grant recipients. Please note that it is *not* necessary to submit copies of publication(s) that have already been submitted to the Foundation.

Eligibility

Grant applicants must:
- be associated with a credentialed Australian research institution through which their application will be made;
- be carrying out research within one of the Foundation's current nominated fields of research;
- have a PhD, MBBS or equivalent; and
- carry out the research outlined in the application in Australia.

Please note:
- Following the successful submission of an application an on-screen confirmation will be displayed which will provide details of your application number that must be retained for your records. An acknowledgement of receipt will also be sent to the email address provided

in your application. If you do not receive an acknowledgement of receipt from the Foundation, the application is treated as not having been submitted. In the absence of such a confirmation, you should try again or contact the Foundation.

- Late applications will not be considered. Difficulties using the online system will not be considered a valid reason for late submission. Please plan to submit your application ahead of the deadline to allow yourself time to sort out any issues that may arise.
- Applications that breach the page limit will be automatically disqualified.
- Applicants are asked not to submit more than one application per year. Members of a group of researchers should not submit separate applications; for instance a group of four researchers putting in four applications, switching Chief Investigators will <u>not</u> maximise the chances of success and may prejudice a related application.
- Funding decisions will be made by the Foundation's directors at a meeting to be held in December 2016. Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their submission in February 2017.
- Applicants must agree to the terms and conditions as set out by The Foundation on its website in order to submit an application.
- Grants will be paid by EFT to the research institution for the use proposed by the chief investigator.
- Only applications for direct costs including equipment and consumables will be considered. Please refer to the NHMRC guide to direct vs indirect costs.
- The directors of the Foundation reserve the right to use their discretion in making funding decisions.
- Infrastructure and administrative levies must not be deducted by the Administering Institution.
- Applicants, successful or otherwise, will be notified of the outcome of their application. A copy of this notification will be emailed to the Administrative Officer nominated on the application form.
- The Foundation is to be recognised in any publications or media derived from the research which it has funded. A copy of such material should be sent to The Foundation and may be published on its website.
- Grant recipients are required to acquit the grant given at the earlier of either the full expenditure of the granted sum or within 12 months of receipt of the granted sum. A Grant Acquittal Report template can be downloaded from the Foundation's website.

PDF formatting requirements

To assist you in meeting these requirements, a word template may be downloaded from our website.

Header	• Applicant surname must be included in top right corner. • The header is allowed outside the margin rules but must be at least 1cm from the top of the page.
Footer	• Page number must be included at the bottom right corner. • The footer is allowed outside the margin rules but must be at least 1cm from the bottom of the page.
Margins	• All margins must be at least 2cm.
Font	• Must be Times New Roman. • At least 12 point.
Line Spacing	• Line spacing must be set to single.
Character Spacing	• Character spacing must be set to normal. • Scale must be set to 100%.
Diagrams Graphics and Images	• Colour diagrams, graphics and images may be included. However, you should keep in mind that the electronic file may be printed in black and white for the review committee and there may be some loss of definition and colour in the images.
Labelling Graphs and Images	• Labelling of graphs and images may be in a reduced font, but should be no less than 10 point Times New Roman. • Description and/or legends of all graphs and images must be no smaller than 12 point Times New Roman.
Tables	• Tabulated information containing text is not considered to be an image or diagram. Therefore, text within tables must be no smaller than 12 point Times New Roman.

To assist with minimising file sizes, it is recommended that any documents needing to be scanned are done at low resolution.

For all sections in the application, applicants must not include links to additional information on an external website.

Section 1 Cover Page_max 1 A4 page

Name(s) of Investigator(s)

Lay Description _ max. 200 words:
Briefly describe the overall aims and expected outcomes and also explain how the research might provide benefit and improve our understanding of the disease/condition

Justification for Funding Support _ max. 150 words:
Why will the requested funding support significantly benefit your research?

Other Sources of Funding for the Project:

Section 2: Grant Proposal _ max. 2 A4 pages

- Proposals must be written in 'plain English' and in a way that is understandable to an informed reader who may not have medical or research expertise. This does not mean that that the content should be oversimplified to the point where details of the rigour of the research methodology are lost.
- Set out what the research is trying to achieve and how the research will benefit the world we live in.
- Explain why the requested funding is important for your research.
- A reference list is not required to be included.
- A quote for the cost of acquisition of any equipment the subject of the proposal is not required to be included.

Section 3: Biographical Sketch of Chief Investigator

Name and Current Role:
Please note, there should only be **one** Chief Investigator on the application.

Institution:

Education/Training:
Begin with baccalaureate or other initial professional education, such as nursing, and include postdoctoral training.

Institution and Location	Qualification	Year(s)	Field of Study

Brief Biography _ max. 350 words:

Brief Bibliographical Review – max. 350 words:
Provide a summary of how many papers published, H-index etc. plus references for your five top publications.

Current Funding:
Provide details of current funding for all projects being undertaken by the chief investigator, including funding that may or may not be related to the application.

Publications from Previous Foundation Funding:
If you have previously received a funding from The Rebecca L Cooper Medical Research Foundation, please provide a reference list of any resulting publications.