

Fellowship Committee Guidelines

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The Rebecca L Cooper Medical Research Foundation (*"The Foundation"*) appoints a Fellowship Advisory Committee (*"FAC"*) to review and assess 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 fellowships.

Structure and Membership of the Fellowship Committee

Senior researchers who have previously received grants from The Foundation are invited to participate in the Fellowship Committee. The expectation is that each Fellowship Committee member (reviewer) will assess a maximum of ten applications across the six fields of research supported by The Foundation. Each application will:

- comprise a two-page proposal and a two page biographical sketch;
- be assessed by three reviewers; and
- be randomly assigned to reviewers.

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.

Process Overview

April:	Receipt and processing of applications
May:	FAC formed Nomination of Conflicts of Interest (<i>"COI"</i>). Assignment of applications to reviewers
30 June:	Assessment deadline
July:	Shortlisting of three candidates / Collation of referee reports for shortlisted candidates
August:	Decision
September:	Announcement of Fellow

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 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. Research Community Participation

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

5. 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 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 Fellowship Committee members will be published on the Foundation's website.

6. Impartiality

Fellowship Committee 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.

7. 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.

8. Integrity

Fellowship Committee 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 Conflict of Interest (Col) 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 (Col) 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 Col is as important as any actual Col. The Foundation is committed to ensuring that COIs are dealt with consistently, transparently and with rigour.

The perception that a Col exists is also a serious matter and raises concerns about the integrity of individuals or the management practices of the institution. 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 COIs

Fellowship Committee 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 COIs

Failure to declare a COI will result in termination of the appointment to the Fellowship Committee 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 COI situations rather than definitive, as each situation is different and needs to be considered on its merits. The table is provided to assist Fellowship 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	Usually high

	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
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 and Criteria

The Foundation is seeking Fellows who **have the potential to be stars of the future and who is *building credentials for a long career in research.***

Applications are to be scored out of 100. Each application is to be assessed using the following 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.

Fellowship details

Valued at a total of \$100,000 per year, for four years, fellows receive funding of \$80,000 per year (*ex GST*) from The Foundation with a commitment by the host institution to provide an additional \$20,000 per year. The funds are to be used as a salary stipend and may not be used for project costs.

Applicant Eligibility and Application Guidelines

Please refer to the 2018 Fellowship Application Guidelines published on The Foundation’s website for full details of applicant eligibility and application guidelines.