



CANCER INSTITUTE NSW

GRANTS PEER REVIEW & GOVERNANCE POLICY

DECEMBER 2008

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1. **PURPOSE**

The Cancer Institute NSW is committed to the independent, expert review of all competitive grant funding applications ensuring processes are fair, accountable and robust and that conflicts of interest are identified and dealt with consistently.

This document is intended to provide information about the policies and governance arrangements for the peer review of competitive grant applications and the ongoing monitoring of the progress of competitive grant projects and activities.

This document also provides the policy framework and governance arrangements to guide the Cancer Institute NSW peer review committees and the Grants Secretariat that support their activities.

2. **INTRODUCTION**

The Cancer Institute NSW is Australia's first state-wide, government supported cancer control agency. We are saving lives by promoting the best cancer research, prevention, early-detection, treatment and education initiatives. We are driving innovation by working in partnership with other leaders in our field to deliver the best cancer results for the people of New South Wales.

The Cancer Institute NSW has the statutory responsibility to substantially improve cancer control in NSW under its Act. The specific objectives of the Cancer Institute NSW are to:

1. Increase cancer survival.
2. Reduce cancer incidence.
3. Improve the quality of life of cancer patients and their carers.
4. Provide expert advice to patients, the public, health care professionals and the Government.

3. **GRANTS REVIEW COMMITTEES**

3.1 **Committees**

Due to the large number of competitive grants that are submitted for review each year, and to ensure that committees are convened with the appropriate mix of experts, the Cancer Institute NSW has established the following Grants Review Committees:

- **Research Grants Review Committee (RGRC):** This committee is responsible for the review of competitive grants that are research focussed and developed to support the strategic programs of the Research Division of the Cancer Institute NSW. The committee is comprised of cancer researchers who are experts across the range of research disciplines.
- **Clinical Grants Review Committee (CGRC):** This committee is responsible for the review of competitive grants that are focussed on developing the clinical workforce and developed to support the strategic programs of the Cancer Services and Education Division of the Cancer Institute NSW.
- **Clinical Trials Grants review Committee(CTGRC):** This committee is responsible for the review of competitive grants that are focussed on the support of the NSW Cancer Trials Network. The committee is comprised of experts in the field of clinical trial methodology and implementation.

To minimise potential conflicts of interest members are normally external to NSW. (Note: The CTGRC has one member from NSW who does not work in cancer clinical trials and has no conflict of interest. Community members may be located in NSW).

From time to time ad hoc committees may also be established to examine matters including progress reports. The Chair of the relevant Grants Review Committee will normally Chair such ad hoc committees.

All committees and subcommittees are supported by the Grants Secretariat.

3.2 Terms of Reference (ToR)

The Terms of Reference of the Grants Review Committees are based on the same principles and vary only with reference to the purpose of the grants under review. The ToR is consistent with the policies and principles contained in this document and are reviewed annually.

3.3 Membership eligibility and qualification

Individual scientific members meet the following standards:

- Relevant and nationally/internationally recognised cancer research or clinical practice excellence.
- Experience and quality as a referee i.e. their breadth of knowledge and maturity of judgement.

Individual community members meet the following standards:

- Not currently engaged in medical or scientific work.
- Quality as an individual and ability to understand general research concepts.

Membership of the committee will satisfy, as a whole:

- A range of cancer research and/or clinical disciplines and community representatives appropriate for the respective committee's area of responsibility.

Chairpersons will satisfy:

- Recognised status within the research and/or clinical community.
- Have the characteristics of leadership and diligence required of the position.

3.4 Membership selection

Nominations for committee membership are solicited by media advertising as well as by recommendation for nomination from current members of the Grants Review Committees, Cancer Institute NSW staff, Board members and any other acceptable, non conflicted source.

The Manager of the Grants Secretariat will discuss the merits and suitability of potential members with the relevant Divisional Directors and, if considered to be suitable, will be further reviewed by the CEO, Cancer Institute NSW and the Chair of the relevant Grants Review Committee.

3.5 Roles and responsibilities for peer review

3.5.1 Chair

The primary roles and responsibilities of the Chair of each GRC are to provide advice to the Board of the Cancer Institute NSW, through the CEO, on the conduct and actions of the GRC, and to work with the Manager, Grants Secretariat, to:

- Ensure that committees function in accordance with Cancer Institute NSW policies and procedures.
- Provide advice to GRC members regarding their roles and responsibilities.
- Ensure the involvement of the entire GRC to obtain consensus on the final ranking of applications.
- Be a point of contact for GRC when required.
- Chair the GRC meetings.
- Determine actions required for declared conflicts of interest.
- Request a GRC member to lead the evaluation and discussion of a particular application.

- Ensure all GRC members are following these guidelines and fulfilling their responsibilities.
- Ensure that recommendations and decisions are well documented and clearly indicate that the established criteria have been applied.
- Ensure that all members are available for meetings. Should a member not be available to make a meeting, a substitute expert may be nominated to score applications and attend the meeting.
- Advise the CEO on the performance of the members of the GRC.

3.5.2 Members

The primary roles and responsibilities of a GRC member:

- Attend (in person/teleconference/videoconference) meetings or provide adequate notice of absence.
- Identify any potential conflicts of interest.
- Review allocated applications according to these guidelines.
- Fully consider applications against the assessment criteria.
- Ensure the scoring for all allocated applications are sent to the Grants Secretariat by the due date.
- Assist the GRC Chair in the confirmation of applications identified as being non competitive.
- Assist the GRC Chair in the ranking of all applications.
- Provide supplementary comments to each application, as required, to ensure applicants receive appropriate feedback about their application.

3.5.3 Grants Secretariat

The primary roles and responsibilities of the Cancer Institute NSW Grants Secretariat:

- Provide all necessary information to GRC members in a timely manner.
- Ensure GRC members are aware of meeting dates and review deadlines.
- Vet incoming applications to ensure potential applicants meet the eligibility criteria.
- Document and register all applications and correspondence
- Ensure all applications are complete prior to sending to GRC members for review.
- Maintain accurate records of conflicts of interest and ensure the GRC Chair is aware of all conflicts of interest declared by GRC members.
- Provide agreed substitute members when GRC members are absent, to ensure a quorum is present (as defined in the Terms of Reference of each GRC). Substitute members must also score each application and provide these to the Grants Secretariat prior to the meeting.
- Collate score sheets and draft rank orders prior to the GRC meetings.
- Attend GRC meetings and provide secretariat support at such meetings.
- Ensure that detailed minutes of GRC meetings are maintained.
- Explaining and interpreting Cancer Institute NSW review policies and procedures.
- Discussing review issues and policies with applicants.
- Organise travel and accommodation arrangements for committee members when attending meetings.

3.6 Applicant non-contact with Grants Review Committee

Applicants, or persons acting on their behalf, must not contact Grants Review Committee members in relation to their application or the review process. If they do so, their application may be ruled ineligible and excluded from further assessment.

All queries about the grants management and peer review process should be directed to the Grants Secretariat.

Contact details are: Debbie Docherty, Manager Grants and Research
Development
Phone: 8374 3561
Email: grants.secretariat@cancerinstitute.org.au
Debbie.docherty@cancerinstitutue.org.au

3.7 Conflicts of interest

The Cancer Institute NSW will make every effort to ensure that its decisions are fair and objective. Accordingly, no GRC member with a confirmed conflict of interest may participate in the review of an application.

All members of GRCs are obliged to comply with the terms of the Cancer Institute NSW *Code of Conduct for Committees and Sub-Committees*. The Code sets out the following requirements:

- A member must disclose interests including positions and pecuniary interests in corporations, partnerships, other businesses or professional pursuits that may be relevant to the activities of the Institute, the Committee or Working Party.
- Members are required to declare possible conflicts of interests. Notwithstanding the initial declaration, each member must be vigilant in reviewing their personal position and ensure that relevant disclosures are made from time to time should the need arise.

In addition, the following circumstances will constitute a potential conflict of interest and must be declared. The GRC member:

- Is from the same immediate institution or company as the applicant, and who interact with the applicant in the course of their duties at that institute or company.
- Has collaborated, published or been a co-applicant with the applicant, within the last five years.
- Has been a student or supervisor of the applicant within the last ten years.
- Is a close personal friend or relative of the applicant.
- Has had a long-standing scientific or personnel differences with the applicant.
- Is in a position to gain or lose financially from the outcome of the application.
- For some other reason, feels that they cannot provide an objective review of the application.

3.8 Confidentiality

All the participants in the review process must respect confidentiality not only with respect to the applications reviewed but also to the peer review process overall.

All information contained in applications and committee discussions and deliberations is strictly confidential. Grants Review Committee members must not disclose confidential or official information or documents acquired as a consequence of their membership other than is required by law and when the member has been given proper authority to do so.

Confidential information received by the member in the course of the exercise of the member's duties remains the property of the organisation from which it was obtained or the property of the Cancer Institute NSW, depending upon the particular circumstance. It is acknowledged that it is improper to disclose and/or to allow such information to be disclosed, unless that disclosure has been authorised by that organisation or the person from whom the information has been obtained, or by the Cancer Institute NSW, as the case may be.

Committee members must not discuss with applicants or referees any information relating to the review of a specific application, or offer opinions on the chances of

success or failure. If GRC members require additional information from applicants, requests are to be forwarded to the GRC Chair who will arrange for the Grants Secretariat to contact the applicant and obtain the required information.

It is the responsibility of the Grants Review Committee members to ensure all paperwork and correspondence relating to the review of applications is confidentially disposed of or returned to the Cancer Institute NSW. All electronic copies of paperwork and correspondence relating to the review of applications must also be deleted.

3.9 Honorarium

Members of the Grants Review Committees are paid an honorarium by the Cancer Institute NSW, commensurate with their role on the committee. Remuneration is designed to cover time spent assessing applications and attending evaluation meetings.

Each member is required to invoice the Cancer Institute NSW against the hours spent undertaking assessments at the conclusion of the process. Related travel will be coordinated on behalf of the member by the Cancer Institute NSW and expenses will be paid upon presentation of receipts in accordance with the relevant Cancer Institute NSW policies.

4.0 PEER REVIEW PROCESS and METHODOLOGY

4.1 Process

Under normal circumstances meetings may be held in person, subject to the complexity of the grants to be reviewed. The decision whether to hold face to face meetings will be the responsibility of the Manager Grants Secretariat. Normally meetings will be organised such that a number of different grant types are reviewed at a single meeting.

Pre-meeting

Prior to each GRC meeting, the Grants Secretariat will ensure that all GRC members have received the necessary documentation. The Grants Secretariat, in consultation with the Chair, will assign members to be spokesperson for specific applications when necessary/applicable.

Prior to each GRC meeting all members are required to:

- Read all applications.
- Declare any conflicts of interest to the Grants Secretariat and the Chair.
- Score all applications based on their merit against the published selection criteria.
- Provide comments suitable for referral to the applicant should he/she be unsuccessful.

Meeting

All members are required to:

- Contribute to discussion on the merit and weaknesses of each application.
- Assist the chair in finalising the scoring and ranking of applications.
- Contribute to the feedback to be provided to unsuccessful candidates.

The Chair is required to:

- Ensure that the duties and responsibilities of the GRC are met.
- Ensure all members review all applications fairly and equitably.

During the meeting:

- All GRC members will be provided with a collated score sheet of all applicants. The Grants secretariat will also weight scores according to the published weightings and provide a draft rank order from highest to lowest rank for each grant type.

- Potential conflicts of interest will be announced. The Chair, in consultation with the members and according to the Code of Conduct, will determine if such potential conflicts of interest are real. If so, the member will be asked to leave the room for consideration of that application and may not score the application.
- The GRC will review the draft rank order and divide into three groups for consideration and to assist with the review, particularly with grant types that have large numbers of applications. The three sections will correlate to *high*, *medium* and *low* rank order.
- The GRC will first consider the *low* group (lowest priority for funding). The Chair will seek agreement from members that all applications in the low group do not adequately fulfil the selection criteria to allow consideration for funding. Members will be given the opportunity to comment on specific applications and discuss a rescore if appropriate. The Chair will also look at the individual scores for each application to ensure any applications having outlying scores are also further considered. Following discussion the members will finalise a rank order for this low group and may move an application(s) into the medium group for further discussion. Otherwise, the applications in this low group will receive no further consideration during the meeting.
- The GRC will then consider the *high* group (highest priority for funding). The Chair will seek agreement from members that all applications in the high group successfully fulfil the selection criteria to allow consideration for funding. Members will be given the opportunity to comment on specific applications and discuss a rescore if appropriate. The Chair will also look at the individual scores for each application to ensure any applications having outlying scores are also further considered. Following discussion the members will develop a rank order for this high group and may move an application(s) into the medium group for further discussion.
- The GRC will then consider the medium group. This is usually the group of applications that requires the most discussion. Spokespersons, when applicable, will be asked to comment on each application in this group followed by other members. Applications moved to this middle group from either the high or low group will also be further discussed against the relative merits of the other applications. Following discussion members will be given the opportunity to rescore an application(s). A revised rank order will then be determined for this middle group.
- A complete and final rank order for applications for the particular grant type under review will then be generated by the Grants Secretariat at the meeting and given final approval by the Grants Review Committee. The GRC will also indicate a 'cut off' rank below which applications are considered not fundable based on poor peer review against the relevant selection criteria.

Exceptions to this process require approval by the CEO in discussion with the Chair.

4.2 Methodology

The GRC is responsible for ensuring, for each grant type, that a rank order of merit against the published selection criteria is developed. The Manager of the Grants Secretariat, in consultation with relevant Divisional Directors, will provide the full budget for each grant type and recommend the number of applications that can be funded. This recommendation may not extend below the "cut off" point. There is no guarantee that a highly ranked application will be successful in being awarded funding as the budget for some grant types may be quite limited and vary between grant rounds.

The prime focus of the peer review process is to assess each application against the published selection criteria for each specific grant funding opportunity. It is not the role of the GRC to make decisions about the number of applications to be funded.

GRC members score and comment on each application against each selection criteria. The scale used is of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). Scores from each GRC member are weighted and collated prior to the GRC meeting so that cumulative scores are provided in a ranking order to the GRC at the meeting.

5. POST MEETING

Recommendations for funding are forwarded to the Chief Cancer Officer by the Manager, Grants Secretariat and appropriate Divisional Director. Recommendations are based on available funds for each grant type and the rank order of applications per GRC review. Once approved, information about the grant round and a list of all successful applicants is forwarded to the Minister and the Board of the Cancer Institute NSW. Information on successful grants is placed on the Cancer Institute NSW website (including title, applicants, administering institution and funds awarded).