NSERC Information Session for The University of Western Ontario

June 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2016
London

Diane Charles, Team Leader, Engineering
Megan Rose-Martel, Program Officer, CISE
DG Program Overview
Discovery Grants Program

Objectives

- To promote and maintain a diversified base of high-quality research capability in the natural sciences and engineering (NSE) in Canadian universities.

- To foster research excellence.

- To provide a stimulating environment for research training.
Evaluation Process Overview

- Two-step process separates merit assessment from funding recommendations.

- Merit assessment uses six-point scale to evaluate:
  - Excellence of the researcher
  - Merit of the proposal
  - Contributions to the training of HQP

- Each application assessed by 5 reviewers in conference model setting, ensuring best possible review.
Evaluation Process Overview

- Funding recommendations: similar overall ratings within an Evaluation Group (EG) receive comparable funding, with possible modulation related to the cost of research.

- Applications grouped into “bins” of comparable merit.

Demystifying the review process for NSERC Discovery Grants
Roles and Responsibilities in the EG

Members

- Key participants in the review process (5 per application)
- Act as a reviewer within their EG and for other EGs (joint reviews)
- Input on policy issues related to the discipline

Executive Committee

- Co-Chairs and Group Chair
- Ensures quality of process (consistency and equity)
- Confirms assignment of applications including joint reviews
- Balances the EG budget following review of applications
- Group Chair acts as EG representative on Committee on Discovery Research, CDR (formerly known as COGS)
  - Acts as spokesperson on policies, scientific/engineering issues
The Conference Model

- Similar to a scientific conference, several sessions occur in parallel streams.

- Members are assigned to various sections/applications on the basis of the match between their expertise and application subject matter.
  - Members may participate in reviews in more than one EG.

- Flexibility allows applications at the interface between Evaluation Groups to be reviewed by a combination of members with pertinent expertise from relevant groups.

- Evaluation structure consists of 12 Evaluation Groups.
Evaluation Groups

- Genes, Cells and Molecules (1501)
- Biological Systems and Functions (1502)
- Evolution and Ecology (1503)
- Chemistry (1504)
- Physics (1505)
- Geosciences (1506)
- Computer Science (1507)
- Mathematics and Statistics (1508)
- Civil, Industrial and Systems Engineering (1509)
- Electrical and Computer Engineering (1510)
- Materials and Chemical Engineering (1511)
- Mechanical Engineering (1512)
Determining a Joint Review

- Applicant
- Suggested EG
  - PO
  - Chair
  - Member
- Application
- Decision on Joint Review

Possible JR EGs

Applicant Suggested EG

Keywords

- Proposal Summary

Possible JR EGs
### Conference Model in Action

**Joint Review for 2016 Competition**

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**Notes:**
- Applications involving members from more than one other EG (i.e. more than 2 EGs participating in the review) appear more than once.
- Joint reviews involving more than one member from the same EG appear only once.
- Reviews involving different streams of the same EG, without participation from other EGs, do not appear.
Implementation of the Conference Model

Reader

Second Internal

Conflicts?

Excellence
Outstanding
Outstanding
Outstanding

Merit
Outstanding
Very Strong

HQP
Outstanding
Outstanding

COR Factor: N N N

Observer

Reader

First Internal

Program Officer

Chair
# Discovery Grant Merit Indicators

## Criteria

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<th>Exceptional</th>
<th>Outstanding</th>
<th>Very Strong</th>
<th>Strong</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Insufficient</th>
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<td>Acknowledged as a leader who has continued to make, over the last six years, influential accomplishments at the highest level of quality, impact and/or importance to a broad community.</td>
<td>The accomplishments presented in the application were deemed to be far superior in quality, impact and/or importance to a broad community.</td>
<td>The accomplishments presented in the application were deemed to be superior in quality, impact and/or importance.</td>
<td>The accomplishments presented in the application were deemed to be solid in their quality, impact and/or importance.</td>
<td>The accomplishments presented in the application were deemed to be of reasonable quality, impact and/or importance.</td>
<td>The accomplishments presented in the application were deemed to be below an acceptable level of quality, impact and/or importance.</td>
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- **Excellence of the Researcher**
  - Proposed research program is clearly presented, is highly original and innovative and is likely to have impact by leading to groundbreaking advances in the area and/or leading to a technology or policy that addresses socio-economic or environmental needs. Long-term and short-term objectives are clearly defined. The methodology is clearly defined and appropriate. The proposal and budget clearly demonstrate how the research activities to be supported are distinct from and complement those funded by other sources.
  - Training record at the highest level, with HQP contributing to top quality research. Most HQP move on to positions that require highly desired skills, obtained through training received. Research plans for trainees are appropriate and clearly defined. HQP success highly likely.

- **Merit of the Project**
  - Proposed research program is clearly presented, is original and innovative and is likely to have impact by leading to advancements and/or addressing socio-economic or environmental needs. Long-term goals are defined and short-term objectives are well planned. The methodology is clearly described and appropriate. The proposal and budget clearly demonstrate how the research activities to be supported are distinct from and complement those funded by other sources.
  - Training record is superior to other applicants, with HQP contributing to high-quality research. Most HQP move on to positions that require highly desired skills, obtained through training received. Research plans for trainees are appropriate and clearly defined. HQP success highly likely.

- **Training of HQP**
  - Proposed research program is clearly presented, is original and innovative and is likely to have impact by leading to advancements and/or addressing socio-economic or environmental needs. Long-term goals are defined and short-term objectives are clearly defined. The methodology is described and appropriate. The proposal and budget demonstrate how the research activities to be supported are distinct from and complement those funded by other sources.
  - Training record is acceptable but may be modest relative to other applicants. Some HQP move on to positions that require desired skills, obtained through training received. Plans for trainees are described and should contribute to HQP success.

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The Discovery Grants Merit Indicators should be used in conjunction with the Peer Review Manual which outlines how reviewers arrive at a rating.

<table>
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<th>Research</th>
<th>High</th>
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<th>Low</th>
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<td>Majority of justified expenses represent costs higher than the norm for the research area.</td>
<td>Majority of justified expenses are within the norm for the research area.</td>
<td>Majority of justified expenses are lower than the norm for the research area.</td>
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*Possible examples include: Cost of training of HQP, Equipment intensive research and/or high user fees; particularly expensive or frequent consumables; Travel (for collaborations, field work, access to facilities, conferences)*

Applying to the Discovery Grants Program
Life Cycle of a Discovery Grant Application

- **August 1**: Submission of Notification of Intent to Apply with CCV
- **September to October**: Initial assignment to EG and contacting of external reviewers
- **November 1**: Submission of grant application with CCV
- **Mid-November**: Applications sent out to external reviewers
- **Early December**: Evaluation Group members receive applications
- **February**: Grants competition
- **March to April**: Announcement of results
Notification of Intent to Apply for a Discovery Grant – When and What?

- **Deadline:** August 1\textsuperscript{st}
  - Electronic submission only through the Research Portal
  - **Mandatory:** if not submitted by deadline, full application will not be accepted

- **Includes:**
  - Notification of Intent to Apply, listing up to five research topics in priority order
  - CCV
Notification of Intent to Apply for a Discovery Grant – Why?

- Facilitates preliminary assignment:
  - to an Evaluation Group;
  - of internal reviewers; and
  - of external reviewers.

- First indication of need for joint review
  - Informed by choice of Research Topics, keywords and proposal summary

- First review of subject matter eligibility
Submitting a Discovery Grant Application

- Deadline November 1st through Research Portal
  - Check institutional internal deadline

- A full Discovery Grant submission includes:
  - Application for a Grant
  - NSERC Researcher CCV for the applicant
  - Samples of research contributions (reprints, pre-prints, thesis chapters, manuscripts, patents, technical reports, etc.)
How to prepare a Discovery Grant Application

Dr. Lindi Wahl,
University of Western Ontario
Section Chair of the Evolution and Ecology Evaluation Group

Dr. Colin Denniston,
University of Western Ontario
Member of the Physics Evaluation Group
Discovery Grants Evaluation Criteria

- Excellence of Researcher
- Merit of Proposal
- Training of Highly Qualified Personnel (HQP)
Excellence of Researcher

- Knowledge, expertise and experience.

- Contributions to, and impact on, proposed and other areas of research.
  - Focus on Natural Sciences and Engineering

- Assessment based on the quality and impact of contributions.

- Assessment based on achievements demonstrated over past six years.
  - “Most significant contributions” section of resume may include earlier work if they still have a significant impact (e.g., exploitation of patents).
Excellence of Researcher

- Describe up to five most significant research contributions (now in application) and highlight quality & impact
- List all types of research contributions (from 2010-2016)
- Explain your role in collaborative research activities
- List all sources of support
- Give other evidence of impact
- Explain delays in research activity (See Peer Review Manual)
Excellence of Researcher

Location of Information

- **In CCV**
  - Recognitions (honors, prizes and awards, etc.)
  - Activities (international collaborations, event administration, editorial activities, organizational review, knowledge and technology transfers, etc.)
  - Memberships (service on committees)
  - Contributions (publications, books, patents, etc.)

- **In Application**
  - Most Significant Contributions (discusses most significant contributions)
  - Additional Information on Contributions (discusses choice of venues, order of authors, etc.)
Merit of the Proposal

- Originality and innovation
- Significance and expected contributions to research; potential for impact
  - Must describe a program of research that will advance knowledge in the Natural Sciences and Engineering
- Clarity and scope of objectives
- Clarity and appropriateness of methodology
- Feasibility of program
- Extent to which the scope of the proposal addresses all relevant issues
- Appropriateness of budget
  - Relationship to other sources of funds must be clearly explained
Merit of the Proposal

- Write summary in plain language
- Keep in mind that two audiences read your application: expert and non-expert
- Can provide a progress report on related research
- Position the research within the field and state-of-the-art
- Clearly articulate short- and long-term objectives
- Provide a detailed methodology and realistic budget
- Consider comments/recommendations you may have received for previous applications
Merit of the Proposal - Conceptual Overlap

- Conceptual overlap occurs when the ideas in the proposal are, or appear to be, the same ideas that are supported by other sources (applicant’s other projects/programs).

- Complementary parts of an applicant’s research program can be supported by different sources.

- The onus is on the applicant to differentiate between the research program covered by the Discovery Grants proposal and other research programs/projects supported by other sources.

- Funds requested from Discovery Grants must support a program of research in the Natural Sciences and Engineering.
Merit of the Proposal – Tips: Overlap

- Discuss relationships to other research support
  - For each grant currently held or applied for, clearly provide: the main objective, a brief outline of the methodology, budget details, and details on the support of HQP
  - Must include summary and budget pages for CIHR and SSHRC grants currently held or applied for
  - Should include summary and budget information for other grants with budget overlap
Additional Recommendations

- Be original and creative, but also show you have the expertise to carry out the program
- Avoid referencing only your own publications
- Have long term vision and short term plan
- Propose a feasible number of objectives
- Propose a program instead of a single short-term project or collection of projects
- Provide clear, precise description of methodology
- Integrate HQP into the proposal
Merit of the Proposal
Location of Information

- In **Application**
  - Proposal
  - List of References
  - Budget Justification
  - Relationship to Other Sources of Support Explanation
  - Other Support Sources – Supporting Documents (if applicable)

- In **CCV**
  - Research Funding History (to assess possible conceptual or budgetary overlaps)
Contributions to the Training of HQP

- Quality and impact of past contributions to training during the last six years (2010-2016)

- Appropriateness and quality of proposed training in the Natural Sciences and Engineering.
  - Assessment based on appropriateness of plan to train particular trainees; Is the proposed level and mix of trainees (e.g. undergraduate, Master’s, or Ph.D. students; postdoctoral fellows) appropriate for the proposed program?
  - Capacity of the researcher to supervise the proposed number and type of HQP.

- Enhancement of training arising from a collaborative or interdisciplinary environment, where applicable.
Contributions to the Training of HQP

Past Contributions to Training:

- Use an asterisk to identify students who are co-authors on the listed contributions
- Explain any delays that might have affected your ability to train HQP
- Describe nature of HQP studies
  - HQP ranges from undergraduate theses and summer projects to postdoctoral levels
- Clearly define your role in any co-supervision
- Do not select “Academic Advisor”
Contributions to the Training of HQP

Training Plan:

- Describe the nature of the training (e.g., length, specific projects) in which HQP will be involved, the HQP’s contributions and pertinence to the research program proposed
- Discuss the training philosophy and the expected outcomes
- Clearly define your role in any collaborative research and planned joint HQP training
HQP - Additional Recommendations

- Describe your involvement and interaction with HQP
- Describe the nature (PhD, master’s, undergraduate), length of time (summer project vs. thesis) and type of training (course-related or thesis)
- Fully describe the nature of co-supervision
- Include present position for past HQP
- Include all levels of HQP, including undergraduates
- Make sure projects are appropriate for level of HQP proposed
Contributions to the Training of HQP

Location of Information

Record of Training

- In **CCV**
  - Supervisory Activities
  - Publications: Co-authors who are trained HQP are to be identified by an asterisk (*)

- In **Application**
  - Past Contributions to HQP Training

Plan for Training

- In **Application**
  - HQP Training Plan
Cost of Research

- Not used by all Evaluation Groups

- Relative cost of research of the proposed research program as compared to the norms for a given discipline / field of research.
  - High, Normal, Low.
  - It is expected that most applications will be deemed to have a normal Cost of Research relative to the discipline.

- A budget that is large simply because of the program’s size, while the cost of the activities is similar to the norm in the discipline / field of research, does not translate into a High cost of research.

Location

- In Application
  - Proposal
  - Budget Justification
We suggest…

 Ask colleagues and/or your RGO for comments on your application
 Read other successful proposals
 Consult the Peer Review Manual
 Plan ahead and check institution deadlines
   Give yourself time: CCV
Application Process for Discovery Grants

- Notification of Intent to Apply (NOI) and full application must be submitted through NSERC’s new Research Portal.

- Applicants must complete and submit NSERC’s version of the Canadian Common CV (CCV) at the NOI and application stages.

- Notification of Intent to Apply (NOI) must be submitted to NSERC by the deadline date of August 1, 8:00 pm Eastern.

- If an NOI is not submitted by the deadline, it is not possible to submit a full application.
Application Process for Discovery Grants

- Instructions are available on NSERC’s Web site.

- Applicants are encouraged to carefully read the instructions on how to complete the NSERC CCV, NOI and application (including page/character limits).

- Applicants are encouraged to complete their CCV as soon as possible as it can be time consuming to populate its fields the first time.
Support Tools for the Discovery Grants Program

- Discovery Grants Information Centre
  - Includes links for the Peer Review Manuals (DG and RTI), Merit Indicators, DAS

- Resource Videos

- Webinars on How to apply (NOI and Full Application stages)
## NSERC Contacts

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Over to you…

• Questions?
• Comments?