



Discovery Grants Program

External reviewer instructions

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How external reviewer reports are used

External reviewers may be more familiar with a particular research area or technique, helping to provide a deeper assessment of an application in their area of expertise. During peer review deliberations, the Evaluation Group committee members review and discuss the reports received for an application.

External reviewer reports are considered the applicant's personal information as defined by Section 3 of the *Privacy Act*. As such, at the end of the competition, NSERC provides each applicant with their respective reports, while protecting the names and identifiers of the reviewers and other third parties (e.g., other applicants or researchers). External reviewer reports are not the property of the reviewer and must therefore be destroyed in a secure manner once submitted (e.g., shredding paper, permanently deleting electronic data files).

How to evaluate an application

Using the External Reviewer Report, provide your comments based on the evaluation criteria outlined below. Evaluate each item, explaining your assessment and what leads you to your conclusions. Refer only to the information contained in the review material provided. This consists of the application, the Canadian Common CV (CCV), samples of research contributions, and, if applicable, an attestation on confidential research contributions.



The integrity of the peer review process relies on high quality reviews.

- **Fair:** Respectful, consistent and appropriate.
- **Informative:** Clear, detailed, constructive and well-justified.
- **Uses inclusive language:** The report should be free from words or sentences that reflect prejudiced, stereotyped or discriminatory language of particular people or groups or their institution. For example, “the applicant” or “they” instead of “he/she”.

Selection criteria

Merit of the Proposal: the proposal must clearly present a **program** of research in the natural sciences and engineering (NSE). The proposed program of research must have long-term goals, rather than a single short-term project or collection of projects.

Describe both the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal related to:

- The originality, innovation of the proposal, and the extent to which it suggests and explores novel concepts and lines of inquiry;
- The significance of and expected contributions to research, and the potential for impact;
- The clarity and scope of the short and long-term objectives, methodology and feasibility;
- The integration of equity, diversity and inclusion considerations in the research process (e.g., the research questions, design of the study, methodology, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of results), where relevant. Consult [Equity, diversity and inclusion considerations at each stage of the research process](#) for more information.

What to avoid

- Identifying yourself, other applicants or researchers in your comments.
- Using information from outside the application material. The onus is on the applicant to provide complete and sufficient information.
- Comments that are vague or short, or that could be construed as sarcastic or inappropriate.



- Overly positive or negative comments that are not supported by references to the application material.
- Unconscious bias, which may be based on a school of thought, fundamental versus applied research, certain sub-disciplines, areas of research or approaches, size or reputation of an institution, personal factors, age, sex, or gender of the applicant. For more information, see the training module on Bias in Peer Review.

Additional information

Contextual information on Discovery Grants

NSERC's Discovery Grants program fosters research excellence, by supporting the activities of academic researchers working at the forefront of science and engineering nationally and internationally and is instrumental in providing a stimulating research environment for the training of the next generation of researchers. Although Discovery Grants are "grants in aid" and are not meant to cover the full costs of a research program, they represent a key source of funding for research in Canadian universities and constitute the foundation of a large part of Canada's research effort in the natural sciences and engineering. These grants cover the direct costs of research only; the researcher's salary and any indirect costs are provided through other mechanisms. Unlike project-oriented grants, the Discovery Grants provide support to university researchers for a long-term program of research. The duration of a Discovery Grant is normally five years.

Conflict of interest and confidentiality

External reviewers must not be in any conflicts of interest. It is important that you adhere to the requirements set out in the [Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Agreement for Review Committee Members, External Reviewers, and Observers](#) ("the Agreement"). If you are unable to do so, you must decline to participate in the review process. Contact us as soon as possible if you discover a conflict.

As stipulated in the [Agreement](#), there may be a real, perceived or potential conflict of interest when the review committee member, external reviewer or observer:

- would receive professional or personal benefit resulting from the funding opportunity or application being reviewed;
- has a professional or personal relationship with an applicant or the applicant's institution; or
- has a direct or indirect financial interest in a funding opportunity or application being reviewed.

A conflict of interest may be deemed to exist or perceived as such when review committee members, external reviewers or observers:

- are a relative or close friend, or have a personal relationship with the applicants;
- are in a position to gain or lose financially/materially from the funding of the application;
- have had long-standing scientific or personal differences with the applicants;
- are currently affiliated with the applicants' institutions, organizations or companies—including research hospitals and research institutes;
- are closely professionally affiliated with the applicants, as a result of having in the **last six years**:
 - frequent and regular interactions with the applicants in the course of their duties at their department, institution, organization or company;
 - been a supervisor or a trainee of the applicants;
 - collaborated, published or shared funding with the applicants, or have plans to do so in the immediate future; or
 - been employed by the institution, when an institution is the applicant;
- feel for any reason unable to provide an impartial review of the application.



In accordance with the [Agreement](#), review documentation must be stored in a secure manner to prevent unauthorized access. When no longer required, review documentation must be destroyed in a secure manner.

Allegations of policy breaches

Allegations of policy breaches, as described in the [eTri-Agency Framework: Responsible Conduct of Research](#) must be treated separately from the peer review process. Should your review reveal concerns of possible policy breaches, report any allegation separately to NSERC program staff. Your external reviewer report should only address the application and selection criteria and make no mention of the breach concerns.

Collection and use of personal information

The information you provide is collected under the authority of the *Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council Act* and stored in a series of NSERC data banks described in NSERC's [Info Source](#). Details on the use and disclosure of this information are described in [Use and Disclosure of Personal Information Provided to NSERC](#). The information is used in accordance with the [Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act](#).

NSERC asks all applicants, co-applicants, committee members and external reviewers to complete a self-identification questionnaire as part of the agency's commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion, as described in the [Tri-agency EDI Action Plan](#). Note that the questionnaire was revised in 2021 to include more questions and response options; additional diversity dimensions could be added in the future.

The self-identification questionnaire is mandatory, but you will have the option to select "I prefer not to answer" for each category. Your completion of this questionnaire will help NSERC better understand the diversity of its reviewers. If you have any questions, please consult the [Frequently Asked Questions about the Self-identification Questionnaire](#). Comments or suggestions about this data collection may be sent to nseequity-equitesng@nserc-crsng.gc.ca.

Reference documents

- [Program objectives for the Discovery Grants program](#);



- [Guidelines on the assessment of contributions to research, training and mentoring;](#)
- [NSERC guide on integrating equity, diversity and inclusion considerations in research;](#)
- [Discovery Grants Peer Review Manual;](#)
- Training module on the [Bias in Peer Review](#).

How to access the application and complete your report

External reviewer access to the application material is provided on NSERC's secure website, known as the Extranet. Once you agree to provide a review, you will receive an email containing information on how to access the Extranet. When you have logged in to the site, navigate to the application's Evaluation Group (refer to your invitation email for this information) through the list on the right side of the screen.

Once on that page, you will find links to view the application, to complete your report, and to an FAQ with more detailed technical information.

Extranet Supported Browsers:

- Microsoft Edge
- Chrome Latest, non-beta, stable version
- Firefox Latest, non-beta, stable version