



SHRF Research Funding Patient Review Committee Guidelines

Updated October 2019





Overview of Programs and Peer Review

1.1 Purpose of Research Funding Programs

SHRF's grants and awards programs are key tools for achieving a legislative mandate to encourage, facilitate and disseminate health research in Saskatchewan in a strategic benefiting the people of Saskatchewan (The SHRF Act, 2002).

For program purposes, SHRF defines health research broadly to include: biomedical research; clinical research in a wide range of health disciplines; health services and systems research; and research into the social, cultural and environmental determinants of health.

Within the broad scope of health research outlined above, SHRF's funding role is largely developmental. Its funding programs and opportunities aim to build health research capacity and foster research relevant to Saskatchewan. Current programs can be found on SHRF's website: shrf.ca/Opportunities.

1.2 Peer Review for Research Funding Applications

All applications to SHRF research funding competitions are adjudicated according to principles of peer review. Review committees evaluate applications according to scientific standards and SHRF-specified criteria related to the funding opportunity purpose and objectives and recommend meritorious applications to SHRF for funding.

Review committees also play an important role in providing feedback to SHRF about procedures, policies and programs, and about trends in the health research community.

Review committees are made up of active researchers and health professionals and may include non-academic reviewers with relevant perspectives for a funding opportunity, such as industry, government, community leaders, patients, etc.

1.3 Patient Review for Research Funding Applications

Currently, patient review committees are formed only for SHRF funding opportunities specifically focusing on patient-oriented research. Patient review committees evaluate applications for the degree to which the proposed research meets patient-oriented research criteria as defined by the Strategy for Patient-Oriented Research (SPOR).

Roles and Committee Membership

2.1 General

The SHRF Funding Programs team, consisting of the Director of Funding Programs, the Funding Programs Officer and the Programs Coordinator, provide administrative support to all patient review committees. Either the Director of Funding Programs or the Funding Programs Officer is designated as program manager for a given competition.

Each patient review committee consists of a chairperson (Chair), and up to 11 other members. Review committee meetings are called by the Chair, with assistance from the SHRF program manager and program coordinator. A quorum consists of the Chair plus 50 per cent plus one of the review committee members.



2.2 Review Committee Chair

The Chair is a respected researcher with experience relevant to the adjudication area. The Chair is appointed by SHRF's Director of Funding Programs, in consultation with the program manager, normally for a term of up to three years, renewable.

Duties of the Chair include the following:

- Select lead reviewers for each application, with support from the program manager;
- Chair review committee meetings to ensure reviews are thorough, fair, consistent, confidential and take into consideration all relevant criteria and standards;
- Vote to break a tie (further information section 3.8) in the final rank order, should that become necessary; and
- Advise the program manager on issues of eligibility and any other major issues that may arise with respect to individual applications or awards.

2.3 Patient Review Committee Members

Patient review committee members are patient or family advisors with personal experience of a health issue.

Duties of the patient review members include the following:


- Review assigned applications according to SHRF's stated criteria;
- Provide SHRF with constructive review comments;
NOTE: *Patient review comments are anonymously shared with applicants. Comments should provide constructive feedback that can be used to improve future submissions, including comments from the patient review meeting discussion. Wording that may be construed as personal, derogatory or offensive should be avoided.*
- Look at all applications in the competition so they can participate in the general discussion and scoring of all proposals;
- Participate in the review committee meeting to discuss, rate and rank all applications in the competition; and
- Offer feedback to SHRF about the process and the program.

NOTE: If a committee member wants to provide additional information (positive or negative, public or private) about a candidate or a candidate's claims in addition to what is presented in an application, this information **must be** vetted through the committee Chair prior to committee discussion of the application. Any such information not vetted through the Chair will not be eligible for discussion during the review process.

Members agree to undertake their role in good faith and abide by accepted standards of review and by other criteria and expectations prescribed by SHRF.

2.4 Program Manager

The program manager is a SHRF staff member responsible for administering the funding program according to policies set by the SHRF Board and CEO. The program manager is supported in this work by the Funding Team as appropriate, specifically the Programs Coordinator.



Specific duties of the program manager related to the patient review committee process include the following:

- With input from the Chair and Director of Funding Programs, suggest patient review committee members for appointment;
- Assist the Chair in selecting lead reviewers for each application from among patient review committee members;
- Ensure committee members receive materials necessary to carry out a thorough and confidential review;
- Ensure that review materials are handled and distributed in a confidential manner;
- Advise the Chair and review committee members on points of procedure, eligibility, program requirements and other related administrative matters; and
- Respond, in consultation with the Chair and the Director of Funding Programs, to questions of eligibility and any other major issues that may arise with respect to individual applications or awards.

Review Procedures

3.1 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is vital to maintaining the credibility of the adjudication process. All information in the applications, all review comments and discussions, and all scores and rankings will be kept confidential by the Chair, committee members, external reviewers, observers, partners and SHRF staff.

The Chair, committee members, external reviewers, observers, partners and SHRF staff must not discuss individual applications, reviews or rankings with anyone not formally involved in the process. They will refer any comments or questions from colleagues and/or others about the review process to the program manager.

The identity of reviewers will not be revealed to applicants. However, a list of review committee members is published as part of SHRF's Annual report. SHRF Annual reports can be found at shrf.ca/reports.


3.2 Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest is a conflict between a person's duties and responsibilities regarding the review process and that person's private, professional, business or public interests. There may be a real, perceived or potential conflict of interest when a committee member:

- 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 committee members:

- Are applicants within the competition and have ability to bias or influence the process to the benefit of their application;
- Are a relative or close friend, or have a personal relationship with an applicant;
- Can gain or lose financially/materially from the funding of an application;

- 
- Have had long-standing personal differences with an applicant;
 - Feel for any reason unable to provide an impartial review of the application.

SHRF reserves the right to resolve areas of uncertainty and to determine if a conflict exists.

Committee members in a conflict of interest with respect to any applicant listed on the application must not participate in any way in the evaluation of that applicant's proposal. The member must declare the conflict prior to the Patient Review Committee meeting, not review any materials from the application, leave the room during the review of the application, not score or comment on the application and will refrain from participating in discussions about the application. The same procedure is followed when the meeting is conducted using virtual meeting room technology or teleconference.

Any committee member may identify a potential conflict of interest of another committee member. The Chair, in consultation with the program manager and/or the Director of Funding Programs, will decide whether a conflict exists. Decisions by the Chair are final.

When the Chair is in conflict of interest with respect to an application, the same procedures will be followed as a review committee member. A designate from the committee will be informed at the earliest convenience and will take on the role of Chair for the review of that application.

3.3 Eligibility Decisions

An initial eligibility screening will take place where SHRF ensures applicants can fulfill basic eligibility requirements for a funding opportunity. Immediately after the application deadline, the program manager and program coordinator will screen all applications for completeness and eligibility, according to program requirements and make a final ruling.

The program manager may take steps to verify applicants' qualifications for eligibility purposes and may seek the advice of the Chair and/or the Director of Funding Programs, as needed. The Director of Funding Programs, in consultation with the program manager, makes the final ruling on eligibility issues.

3.4 Assigning Reviews

The Chair and the program manager assign each application two committee members, known as lead reviewers, who will provide an in-depth review to lead the committee's evaluation of the application at the review meeting.

Prior to assigning reviewers, the program manager will do an internal check regarding reviewer background, where they will identify any possible conflicts of interest with the applicant(s) or the topic. The program manager will then be in touch with the patient reviewer to confirm this conflict.

3.5 Review Materials

The program manager supplies review materials to committee members before the review meeting. Completed reviews, along with all shared materials, are to be sent back to the Program Manager.

To best support the patient review committee, SHRF has created a Patient Committee Review Package. In this package, you will find the following:

- General Information needed to complete the reviews, such as: What's New Information document; Contacts for SHRF & SCPOR; Patient Reviewer Committee List; Important Dates; these Patient Reviewer Committee Guidelines; a Contract to be reviewed and signed by each member; Meeting Information; and a Time Tracking Sheet
- Review Phase 1: An information sheet regarding Conflict of Interest, Level of Comfort and the Patient Review Orientation presentation
- Review Phase 2: Preliminary review instructions; Master List; Review Criteria; Lead reviewer applications; Review form for each application to review; and Reader applications
- Review Phase 3: Review meeting information; Meeting agenda; Travel guidelines; Expense claim form; Post meeting information, such as the final review deadline, survey and results, and information on sending time and travel sheets
- Appendices, which will include the SCPOR PORLET tool and SHRF's Evaluation Criteria

3.6 Review Criteria and Scoring

Patient committee members shall follow the SHRF review criteria, as appropriate, when reviewing and scoring each assigned application.


For each application, patient reviewers will assign a score that reflects their assessment of its quality and merit for funding, using the below scale. Reviewers are encouraged to use the full range of scores in the rating scale. SHRF is committed to excellence and will fund only proposals that achieve at least 2 or higher in each of the following areas:

- Patients as partners
- Patient-identified priorities
- Patient reported outcomes
- Integrating knowledge into practice

The program manager provides committee members with program-specific review criteria and scoring guidelines to guide their assessments.

Rating Scale:

4.6 – 4.9	outstanding: highest funding priority
4.1 - 4.5	excellent: very high funding priority
3.6 – 4.0	very good: high priority; should be funded
3.1 - 3.5	good: acceptable, but low priority
2.6 – 3.0	fair: not acceptable for funding but shows promise
2.0 - 2.5	poor: needs major revision
<2.0	seriously flawed



Lead reviewers are asked to submit their preliminary reviews by the assigned deadline prior to the meeting, which includes the initial scores and preliminary comments. Once both lead reviewers have submitted their preliminary reviews, SHRF staff will share the reviews with the other lead reviewer and the Chair.

Reviewers are asked to submit their final review comments to SHRF shortly following the review meeting. Comments should be updated to reflect the committee discussion prior to the final submission. Scores do not need to be updated in the review form as the final score has been recorded by the program manager following the review meeting and only this score is shared with the applicant(s).


3.7 Review Meeting

The review committee members meet to discuss and rate all applications, indicating to SHRF which applications are worthy of funding, according to stated evaluation criteria.

At the beginning of the meeting, the Chair and program manager will review procedures and update the committee on any outstanding matters from the previous year's meeting.

The review process itself entails the following steps:

- Any review members with an identified conflict will be asked to leave the meeting during the discussion of the application.
- The Chair will ask the two lead reviewers (primary, then secondary) to announce their initial scores for the application (to one decimal place).
- If both initial scores are **1.9 or lower**, the application is not considered further, unless a committee member requests for the application to be discussed.
 - If an application is not discussed, committee members will identify triaged on their score sheet using the letter "T" and no final score will be achieved during the meeting. The applicant will be provided the average of the initial lead reviewer scores and no rank will be assigned.
- The first lead reviewer (primary):
 - Provides a brief summary of the project (1-2 minutes, maximum);
 - Presents their assessment of the application, describing the strengths and weaknesses in relation to the review criteria and rating scale;
- The second lead reviewer (secondary):
 - Responds to primary comments, confirming areas of general agreement and addressing any points of disagreement.
- After the lead reviewers overview of the application, all committee members are invited to comment on the application, with the Chair leading the discussion.
- After general discussion is complete, the Chair asks the two lead reviewers to agree on a single consensus score. If the lead reviewers are unable to reach a consensus score, the average of their individual scores following the committee discussion is used.
- All committee members, including the lead reviewers of the application, will assign their own individual confidential scores within +/- 0.5 of the consensus score.
 - **Example:** Consensus rating is 3.6, therefore scores could range from 3.1 to 4.1.

- 
- After scoring is complete, the Chair asks if any committee member has any concerns. The SHRF program manager will make note of any concerns to take appropriate follow-up action. If necessary, release of grant funds will be conditional upon the applicant addressing these concerns to the satisfaction of the SHRF program manager.

After the committee has reviewed all applications, they will give their individually completed score sheet to the program manager who averages the committee members' scores to produce a final score for each application. The resulting rank-ordered lists constitute the committee's funding recommendations.

If a tie occurs between application scores, the Chair (or Chair designate if there's a conflict) will be invited to break it and identify the final ranking for each application. Decisions will be made based on the Chair's reading of the applications and the committee discussion.

Example: If two applications score 3.9 and both have a rank order of 6th, the Chair will break the tie and identify which application is 6th and which application is 7th in the rank order.

After the completion of application reviews, the Chair will invite committee members to offer feedback about review procedures and materials, program criteria and other matters that may be helpful to SHRF's research funding mandate. SHRF will also send out a survey to the Chair and committee members to share feedback on SHRF's review process.

Funding Decisions and Announcements

4.1 Funding Decision

The CEO approves funding based on the patient and peer review committees' recommendations, available funding and other relevant organizational policies.

4.2 Informing Applicants

All applicants are informed of their outcome in writing. No results are given by telephone.

SHRF does not have an appeal process.

Feedback to applicants include:

- the final score and ranking
- an anonymous copy of lead reviewers' comments from both patient and peer review committee, and external reviewer comments, if applicable, offering constructive feedback to the applicant.

4.3 Announcing Results

Recipients and their host institutions must keep the results confidential until SHRF has made an official public announcement. All recipients and their host institutions will be notified when this announcement has been/will be made.

Successful applicants will be announced following SHRF's Communication processes.



324 - 111 Research Drive, Saskatoon, SK S7N 3R2 | shrf.ca

