



## **Research Project Review & Appeals Process**

The following details the process in which MEOPAR and its Research Management Committee (RMC), Board, and any additional guest reviewers assess research projects for funding through a Call for Proposals (CFP) and through the Network's annual review process.

MEOPAR strives to provide equitable treatment of applications and fair assessment in accordance with selection criteria and fund availability, and judges each case on its merits.

MEOPAR has two types of CFPs: open and partnered. Open CFPs are solely funded by MEOPAR (with additional funding possibly brought in from other organizations by the applicant) and eligible Canadian researchers are invited to submit proposals on topics relevant to MEOPAR's strategic plan. Partnered CFPs involve other organizations, which have contributed funding and are involved in the project review and decision process. The review and approval processes for partnered CFPs are slightly modified than that of the open CFP. Each partner enters into a different agreement with the Network with respect to their involvement in the review and approval of projects.

This document outlines the review process for open CFPs.

### **A. New Proposals**

#### **1) Calls for Proposals (CFP)**

Research proposals are solicited through an open, transparent process and are reviewed by MEOPAR's RMC, and, when necessary, additional guest reviewers. The Board of Directors (BOD) has ultimate responsibility for approving project funding.

Based on MEOPAR's strategic plan, the RMC identifies, and recommends to the BOD, research topics for the CFP, which help the Network achieve its strategic goals. The CFP is reviewed by the BOD and once approved, is publically announced and distributed to investigators, partners and university members.

Each proposal is required to identify a Principal Investigator (PI), who submits the proposal on behalf of the research team, and if funded, is responsible for signing the performance and reporting agreement. Specific proposal requirements and eligibility guidelines differ between CFPs, so applicants are expected to read each carefully.

## **2) Review of Submitted Proposals**

Proposals are sent to MEOPAR's Administrative Centre, where an initial compliance check is done. Proposals are returned to applicants if they are not in compliance with the CFP's guidelines and applicants are given 24 hours to make any corrections. Working with the RMC, the Administrative Centre checks the proposals for conflicts of interest with individual RMC members. When identified, the conflicted RMC member is excused from both the review procedure and any discussions or decisions, which directly impact funding of that specific proposal. As noted in the RMC Terms of Reference, in cases where RMC members are in conflict, external reviewers may be invited to review proposals and provide their comments and recommendations for consideration by the remainder of the RMC. Please see MEOPAR's Conflict of Interest Policy for more information.

Each proposal is assigned at least three (3) reviewers who are responsible for providing an in-depth evaluation of the proposal, including the appropriateness of its proposed budget, and for leading the discussion with the rest of the RMC (excluding those in conflict). The Chair invites Theme Leads to discuss the proposal's fit within the Network's thematic structure and its potential linkages with other projects.

Following the discussion, the Chair seeks consensus to select the proposals and their funding levels, which are appropriate within the overall budget approved by the BOD. In exceptional circumstances, the RMC can propose expanding the available overall budget subject to BOD approval.

For proposals that require a scope of work or budget modification, the Administrative Centre contacts the PI, provides them with the RMC's feedback, and asks them to resubmit their proposal based on the RMC's suggestions.

### 3) Funding Recommendations, Decision and Notification

Based on the RMC's counsel, the Scientific Director recommends a set of proposals to the BOD for final approval, with an explanation of how this fits within the Network's broader strategic objectives.

Applicants not recommended for funding receive a letter from the Executive Director on behalf of the RMC including a brief synopsis of the review. On request, the Scientific Director(s) or a non-conflicted member of the RMC will answer questions and offer advice on future applications.

Successful applicants receive a notification of award from the Executive Director, which outlines the total and annual funding allotments as well as a brief synopsis of the review. While proposals may include a multi-year budget for approval, funding is awarded on a semi-annual basis (normally November and April) subject to a progress review (see below). Awards may be granted with conditions, which are communicated to the applicant in the award letter.

Research funding is provided only upon compliance with the following requirements:

- Signing the Network Agreement – required by all Participating Institutions receiving funds from MEOPAR Inc.
- Signing Network Agreement Appendix A – required by investigators and highly-qualified personnel receiving funds from MEOPAR Inc.
- Signing Network Agreement Appendix B – required by investigators receiving funds from MEOPAR Inc.
- Signing of the Performance and Reporting Agreement – required by the PI
- Submission of semi-annual financial statements and annual progress reports

### 4) Appealing a Decision

The procedures described below are based on NSERC's appeal process. An appeal of a decision for a MEOPAR CFP must be based on compelling evidence of error or discrimination in the review process. The appeal procedure is designed to ensure that the applicant has been treated fairly and consistently in the context of a program that has specific strategic goals and limited funds.

## 4.1) Grounds for Appeal

Grounds for appeal generally fall into the following categories:

### Procedural Grounds

- A failure by MEOPAR Administrative Centre staff to provide relevant information to the RMC;
- An undeclared or unaddressed conflict of interest within the RMC;

## 4.2) Appeal Process

The onus is on the applicant to demonstrate that a procedural error was made or that there are other grounds for appeal in the review of the application.

Appeals are reviewed by external consultants who are senior members of the research community but who do not sit on the RMC nor currently receive MEOPAR funds. This ensures an arm's length review by the applicant's peers.

No new "source" material or information (e.g. papers published since the deadline date, illness or other extenuating circumstances) may be submitted by the applicant.

The appeal process is as follows:

- Appeal letters must be received by the MEOPAR Executive Director within one (1) month of receipt of the decision letter.
- If an appeal is submitted, the Executive Director does a preliminary analysis to ensure that a sufficient case has been made.
- If the Executive Director judges that a sufficient case has not been made, a recommendation to dismiss the appeal (without sending it to an outside consultant) is made to the BOD. The final decision to dismiss the appeal is made by the BOD.
- For those appeals in which the Executive Director judges that a sufficient case has been made, the case is forwarded to an external consultant and the BOD is informed that an appeal process is underway. The appeal letter, original

proposal, RMC's comments, and any other relevant material or past correspondence will be sent to the consultant for review.

- The consultant sends a written report and recommendation to the Administrative Centre within thirty (30) days. The report includes an analysis that addresses the main arguments of the applicant(s), and should indicate the main elements leading to the consultant's recommendation. The RMC will provide comments on the consultant's report within two (2) weeks of receipt. The consultant report and RMC comments will be communicated to the BOD by the Scientific Director.
- The BOD reviews the appeal, analysis, recommendation from the consultant and RMC comments and makes a final decision regarding the appeal. The BOD's decision is final and no further appeals will be granted.
- The Executive Director sends the appeal decision, along with any related material, to the applicant. Depending on the result, the level and/or duration of a grant may be subject to modification.

## **B. Annual Review of Projects and Core Activities**

Though research projects and Core activities may be approved for between 1-4 years, funds are awarded on a semi-annual basis with projects and Cores subject to an annual progress review completed by the RMC.

The progress of each MEOPAR project and Core activity is monitored on an ongoing basis with an annual in-depth review. Each project PI and Core Lead must submit a MEOPAR annual progress report in March detailing the year's progress including major accomplishments, impediments to progress or a change to project/Core deliverables. The report must include a description of work planned for the next year, including the approach to be taken, a description of the research team (including relevant partners) and specific project or Core activity milestones. PIs and Core Leads are responsible for submitting the annual progress report on behalf of all project/Core investigators. If a progress is deemed to be unsatisfactory the PI or Core Lead may be given an opportunity to address the issue(s) or funding may be reduced or stopped.

### **1) Review of Progress Reports by RMC**

The Administrative Centre receives the progress reports, verifies them for completeness, and forwards the reports to the RMC for review. The Research Program Coordinator, with the Scientific Directors and the Theme Leads, conducts an initial

review of the reports and produces a briefing note for the RMC highlighting any projects or Core activities with significant areas of concern as well as those with major achievements.

Working with the RMC, the Administrative Centre checks the proposals for any conflicts of interest with individual RMC members. When identified, the conflicted RMC member is excused from both the review procedure and any discussions or decisions regarding funding. In cases where several RMC members are in conflict, external scientific reviewers may be invited (in extreme cases) to review progress reports and submit their comments and recommendations for consideration by the RMC (non-conflicted members). Please see MEOPAR's Conflict of Interest Policy for more information.

The RMC evaluates reports according to the original proposals/work plans, the Network's criteria for research projects, NCE evaluation criteria and against Network research objectives. Following discussion, the Chair seeks a consensus to place projects into one of three categories, viz projects or Core activities recommended (a) for continued funding at the requested level; or (b) for continued funding with modifications to the budget and/or work plan or (c) for termination.

The Administrative Centre is responsible for documenting the RMC's comments concerning projects or Core activities that fall into categories "b" and "c".

## **2) Funding Recommendation, Decision and Notification**

Based on the RMC's recommendation, the Scientific Director presents the results of the annual review to the Board of Directors for final approval.

Once approved, the Administrative Centre sends the RMC's report to the PI of each project or Core Lead with the funding decision.

Projects or Core activities which have their funding terminated (see [Tri-Agency Financial Administration Guide – "Termination of a Grant"](#)) or modified receive a letter from the Executive Director, on behalf of the BOD, indicating the results of the review.

## **3) Appeal Process**

The procedures for appealing a decision of the annual review of a funded project or Core activity are the same as those for new proposals. See Section 4.2.

