MANITOBA BLUE CROSS®

Health Research FOUNDATION

Formerly known as MMSF

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MANITOBA BLUE CROSS - HEALTH RESEARCH FOUNDATION
RESEARCH OPERATING GRANT
GUIDELINES AND CRITERIA

GUIDELINES AND CRITERIA FOR APPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH FUNDS

The Manitoba Blue Cross - Health Research Foundation (MBC-HRF) will consider the provision of funds for the advancement of scientific, educational, and other activities in the maintenance and improvement of the health of the residents of Manitoba. The primary focus of the Foundation is to promote and encourage the work of new health researchers in Manitoba.

Research applications are welcomed from Manitoba-based researchers[1] in the health field, e.g., physicians, scientists, social workers, nurses, epidemiologists, and any other health workers engaged through organizations involved in the preventive, therapeutic and rehabilitative care of persons or groups of persons.

Applications may be submitted in a language of your choice, however, to ensure that all applications are similarly and fairly adjudicated, any applications and related materials that are submitted in a language other than English must be accompanied by an accurate translation issued by the primary investigator or a member in good standing of a provincial or territorial organization of translators and interpreters in Canada. Reviews, grant agreements, interviews and all correspondence will be conducted in English. The MBC-HRF does not have the ability to translate applications, documents, or correspondence nor the ability to conduct interviews in any other language.

Applicants are required to provide letters of support from each Mentor(s), Collaborator(s) and any partnering agencies.

Board Members of MBC-HRF cannot submit a grant application, nor can they be co-applicants, co-investigators, or collaborators for MMSF research operating grants.

Applications for the Manitoba Medical Service Foundation Research Operating Grant are located on the MMSF website at mbc-hrf.ca and submitted directly to info@mb-hrf.ca. All submissions are due by **4:00 pm on June 1**. If June 1 falls on a Saturday or Sunday, the deadline for submission will extend to 4:00 pm the next business day. Only one application per year will be considered from any principal investigator.

Research grants awarded are not to be greater than $45,000 and are only for a two-year period commencing the 1st of January in the following year. All funded projects must begin within three (3) months of the allocation date. Any unused funds may not be carried forward without special permission from MBC-HRF. When permission is obtained from MBC-HRF, a period of three (3) months will be allowed for the expenditure of carry-over funds.

Funds will be administered through an approved agency (e.g., University of Manitoba), which will submit quarterly account reports to MBC-HRF on behalf of the grant recipient.

Grants are not transferable from one recipient to another, and the money must be expended on the specific research project for which it was granted.

Grants may be used by the MBC-HRF in attracting partnership funding from other sources. All eligible applicants must attend an interview with an Award Review Panel. The Award Review Panels are comprised of MBC-HRF Board Members who include a mixture of physicians, healthcare workers, scientists, as well as individuals who are not scientists or in a healthcare profession. Interviews are scheduled in September of the competition year. During the interview, applicants will be required to give a summary of their project followed by answering questions from the panel. The panel will evaluate, and grade applications based on a category and project point scale. Recommendations for funding will be made to the Board of Directors for final approval by the Awards Assessment Committee based upon panel scoring and availability of funds. Decision letters will be sent to all applicants following the December Board meeting.

The highest priorities for funding will be given to Early Career Researchers[2] applying for meritorious projects. Established Researchers[3] applying for support of a project will only be eligible to apply should they meet the requirements included in the Experienced Researcher[4] definition. All other Established Researchers are not eligible to apply.

Applications for additional support by MBC-HRF beyond the initial the two-year period will not be accepted. Applicants are expected to approach other granting agencies for continuing support.

No principal investigator (PI) will be eligible for funding if a MBC-HRF research operating grant has been previously awarded to that individual as a PI. The only exception are Residents and Clinical Fellows[6] who have received an operating grant, as they shall subsequently be eligible to apply for an operating grant when they become an independent researcher.

Residents and clinical fellows are eligible to apply for research operating grants. However, a letter of support is required from their supervisor and department head assuring that salary funding support is in place and research time is available to complete the study within the granting term.

Postdoctoral fellows (post PhD), research associates, and research affiliates are not eligible to apply.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

The MBC-HRF supports the policies of the CIHR as they pertain to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). Achieving more equitable, diverse, and inclusive research in Manitoba is essential to creating the excellent, innovative, and impactful research necessary to advance knowledge and understanding, and to respond to local, national, and global challenges. Manitoba Medical Service Foundation aims to systematically integrate Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis into MBC-

HRF funded research, to ensure that the research we fund is relevant and impactful for Manitoba's diverse population.

The CIHR has several resources pertaining to EDI's importance on sex and gender research. The MBC-HRF encourages you to review these guidelines and tools at https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/50836.html.

LEGEND (DEFINITIONS)

Most definitions have been adapted from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

[1]*Manitoba-Based Researchers*: To qualify as a Manitoba-based researcher, the principal investigator must maintain status as a resident of Manitoba.

[2]*Early Career Researcher:* Researchers who are within five (5) years of the date of the first independent research-related appointment. These may include Residents and Clinical Fellows (Residents and Clinical Fellows are not required to have an academic or research appointment). The MMSF defines the start of the five (5) years to begin when the applicants received their first appointment at a research institution[8] in any province or country.

[3]*Established Researcher:* Researchers who are beyond five (5) years of establishing themselves as an independent researcher.

[4]*Experienced Researcher:* Established researchers who conduct additional training (e.g., MSc or PhD) will be eligible as an experienced researcher contingent upon being within five (5) years from the completion date of their new training and the application being research in the area of the new training.

[5]*Residents and Clinical Fellows:* Are individuals who are enhancing their research skills through actual involvement in research and who work under the formal supervision of an independent researcher. For example: a postgraduate-health professional degree fellow (e.g., in nursing, physiotherapy, medicine, dentistry) at an academic institution or research institution[8]. This list of examples is not exhaustive. Applicants are encouraged to communicate with MBC-HRF.

[6]*Independent Researcher:* An individual who:

- is autonomous regarding their research activities; and
- has an academic or research appointment which:
  - must commence by the effective date of funding; and
  - allows the individual to pursue the proposed research project, to engage in independent research activities for the entire duration of the funding, to supervise trainees, and to publish the research results; and
  - obliges the individual to conform to institutional regulations concerning the conduct of research, the supervision of trainees, and the employment conditions of staff paid with MMSF funding.

Note: An individual who meets the above requirements but is also a "Resident/Clinical Fellow" as defined below, is considered an "independent researcher" by MBC-HRF provided that:

- the research proposal covers only areas of investigation for which one is deemed to be an independent researcher; and
- one can demonstrate in the application to MBC-HRF that one will have sufficient time to devote to the proposed research.

In these cases, the individual must attach a description of their area of study to the application.

[7]*Academic Institution:* An institution dedicated to education and research; and which grants academic degrees.

[8]*Research Institution:* An institution dedicated to conducting research.

RATING GUIDELINES

Categories	
A1	Early Career Researcher – with less than $100,000 of funds annually granted for research from competitive grants at the time of application submission.
A2	Early Career Researcher – with more than or equal to $100,000 of funds annually granted for research from competitive grants at the time of application submission.
A3	Experienced Researcher – with less than $100,000 in funds annually granted for research from competitive grants at the time of application submission.
A4	Experienced Researcher – with more than or equal to $100,000 in funds annually granted for research from competitive grants at the time of application submission.
B	A grant application with quality insufficient to consider funding.

Category Point Scale			**Project Point Scale**		**Communications Point Scale (Kerry Bittner Award Qualifier)**	
A1	25 Points	Level 1	Excellent	16-20 Points	Excellent	9-10 Points
A2	20 Points	Level 2	Very Good	11-15 Points	Very Good	7-8 Points
A3	15 Points	Level 3	Good	6-10 Points	Good	5-6 Points
A4	10 Point	Level 4	Acceptable	1-5 Points	Acceptable	3-4 Points
B	0 Points	Level 5	Insufficient Quality	0 Points	Poor	<3 Points
Total			**Total**		**Total**	
(Shaun Lamoureux Best Overall Award Qualifier) TOTAL						

CONDITIONS FOR FUNDING

1. Letters of support are required from each Mentor(s), Collaborator(s) and any partnering agencies with the grant application.
2. Grantees are required to submit a final report within one to two years of completion of the project.

3. Any changes required in the method of fund disbursement must first be approved by MBC-HRF.
4. Equipment purchased by a MBC-HRF grant becomes the property of the sponsoring agency, (e.g., University of Winnipeg), and not the individual researcher. Applications made for equipment costs are only considered favorably when no other similar equipment is available for use by the applicant in the work area. The cost of equipment is not to exceed 50% of the annual grant awarded.
5. Travel expenses will be made available only in special circumstances. Allowable expenses include field trips for the collection of specimens or the use of facilities away from the usual location of research. Attendance at conferences, meetings and symposia will not be funded.
6. Any publications arising from the grant should acknowledge the source of funding and copies of publications should be forwarded to MBC-HRF.
7. Institutional costs are not eligible expenses for grants and awards funding.
8. Failure to comply with the conditions governing the grant may prejudice the continuation of funding.

POLICIES OF GRANT REVIEW

In selecting people to participate in conducting external peer reviews of grant applications or to serve on its Awards Review Panel and to serve on its Awards Assessment Committee, the MBC-HRF looks for individuals who have experience, knowledge and are open-minded to make an efficient, effective, and ethical evaluation. The MBC-HRF engages external peer reviewers to assist in conducting a review of grant applications. Reviewers include peer reviewers, members of the MBC-HRF Award Review Panels and members of the MBC-HRF Awards Assessment Committee and are hereafter referred to as Reviewers. Elements of an ethical review are described below and together comprise the Policies of Grant Review.

Confidentiality of Information

1. Reviewers must treat both the material that they review, and any documents and discussions related to their assessment as strictly confidential.
2. Reviewers must not discuss with applicants, or anyone outside of the committees or MBC-HRF, any information relating to the review of a specific application or offer opinions on the chances of success or failure.
3. Reviewers must not disclose information about grant applications or award nominations.
4. Reviewers must not discuss the names of the applicants, the recommendations, nor any comments made by other Reviewers during meetings.
5. All materials related to the review process must be kept by Reviewers in a secure manner to prevent unauthorized access.
6. Materials must be transmitted using secure carriers and technologies. Any loss or theft of these materials must be reported to MBC-HRF immediately.
7. When materials are no longer required, all material related to applications and their review must be returned to MBC-HRF for retention or destruction or be securely filed or destroyed by the Reviewer.

Applicants must not contact Reviewers, including the Chair, or any MBC-HRF Directors, regarding the status of their application (ratings, rank within committee, etc.) at risk of disqualification. All requests for information on an application or a review should be referred to the MBC-HRF Executive Director.

External peer reviews may be shared with the applicant if permission has been granted by the Reviewer. MBC-HRF will not edit the external peer reviews provided. The identity of the external peer reviewer will not be revealed to the applicant unless written permission has been provided by that Reviewer.

Applicants, external peer reviewers and MBC-HRF panel and committee members are hereby advised that while the review process is intended to remain confidential, and discussions and disclosure of information are intended to be restricted, MBC-HRF cannot guarantee the confidentiality and security of either the application or review material.

Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest (COI) is a conflict between a person's duties and responsibilities about the MBC-HRF Research Operating Grant Application or award review process, and that person's private, professional, business, or public interests. Some factors to consider when determining if a COI exists in the review of an application are:

a) Potential for professional or personal benefit
b) Level of leadership or immediate authority over the candidate
c) Professional or personal proximity to the competition or application being reviewed, or to the applicant
d) Direct or indirect financial interest in a competition or application being reviewed
e) MBC-HRF board members are not permitted to be principal investigator, co-applicants, co-investigators, or collaborators on research operating grants

No Reviewer with a conflict of interest may participate in the review of an application. A Reviewer is considered to have a COI with an application if they meet any of the following criteria:

a) has collaborated, been a co-applicant or published with the applicant, within the last five years (exception will be made for funded networks designed to increase partnerships among disciplines or institutions, and thematic research)
b) has been a student or supervisor of the applicant within the last ten years
c) is a friend or applicant's relative
d) has had long-standing scientific or personal disagreements or disputes with the applicant
e) can gain or lose financially from the outcome of the application (e.g., holds stock in the company of an industry partner or a competitor outside of a mutual fund); or
f) for some other reason feels that they cannot provide an objective review of the application.

MBC-HRF must make every effort to ensure not only that its decisions are fair and objective, but also that they are seen to be so. Any otherwise eligible reviewer may be considered for

providing an external peer review or serving on the Awards Review Panel or Awards Assessment Committee unless they:

a) have disclosed a potential COI about the competition to be reviewed, and has been determined to be in material conflict of interest in regard to the competition, by MBC-HRF's Executive Director or their delegate, or
b) are a Principal Investigator on an application to be reviewed by the Awards Assessment Committee.

The above COI criteria would not usually be considered a COI with a collaborator named in the grant application, as the MBC-HRF adjudication is with the principal applicant. However, in selected submissions there may be a potential conflict of a reviewer with a collaborator of the application which would be considered substantive. In this situation, or if there is uncertainty, the reviewer should promptly notify the grant administrator or MBC-HRF Executive Director.

All Reviewers are subject to the same COI guidelines. It is the responsibility of the individual Reviewer to identify and notify MBC-HRF of any potential conflict of interest, in a timely manner after the request for participation of the Reviewer has been made. MBC-HRF Executive Director or Assistant Executive Director and the Chair of the Awards Review Panel are responsible for resolving areas of uncertainty before and/or during the interview.

All Reviewers must read and agree to abide by the MBC-HRF Policies of Grant Review prior to viewing any application information. By agreeing to act as a Reviewer and to perform a review, it is deemed that the Reviewer has read and agrees with the MBC-HRF Polices of Grant Review.

Fairness

Success of the review system is critically dependent upon the willingness and ability of all Reviewers to be fair and reasonable; to exercise rigorous scientific judgment; and to understand, and consider, in a balanced way, the context of each application. MBC-HRF does not take responsibility for the content of the external reviewer. Only a constructive review, which includes helping an applicant by pointing out deficiencies, and/or suggestions for improvement, will be considered and forwarded to the applicant.

MENTORSHIP

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is most often defined as a professional, personal developmental relationship in which a more experienced or knowledgeable person (the mentor) assists a less experienced or knowledgeable person (the mentee) in developing specific skills and knowledge that will enhance the less-experienced person's professional and personal growth. The mentor may be older or younger but should have a certain area of expertise. It is a learning and development partnership between someone with vast experience and someone who wants to learn. MBC-HRF's intention for the mentoring process is that the mentor should be an expert in the research area, successful in grant funding and generous regarding time allocation to the grant review

process. The mentor should help the mentee to express their approach in a way that will answer reviewers' queries as to focus, scientific feasibility and interpretability of results. The mentor can also assist in the identification of and the means to address the common problems seen in grants from new investigators (too broad/lack of focus; lack of clarity between the projects to be funded by the current grant and others held by the PI; lack of a clear statement linking hypotheses, projects, deliverables and intended interpretation). MBC-HRF's request for formal or structured mentoring is intended to take mentoring to the next level and aims to expand its usefulness and learning value. Additionally, multiple mentors can be helpful because having more than one mentor may widen the knowledge of the person being mentored, as different mentors may have different strengths.

What are the benefits of mentoring?
Mentoring benefits research program planning and research program development, grant application submissions and the development of career/research goals for the mentee. At the grant submission stage, mentors enhance grant success for the mentee through anticipating reviewers' queries, addressing the feasibility of the approach/research plan in the new investigator's lab and using the page limit well, through good focus and communication skills. By enlisting mentors at the research project stage, new investigators can speed quickly over the bumps and cut through unnecessary work. Mentors can assist in explaining and navigating day to day tasks and eliminating unnecessary roadblocks. Mentors can help the mentee to streamline processes and to get things done more quickly, efficiently, and effectively.

What is a mentor?
A person who helps to guide the mentee's career, through support, feedback, providing perspective and advice as needed. A mentor can assist in the building of networks and the avoidance of problems.

Qualities of a good mentor
Relevant work experience, role model for career success (especially at writing grants), enthusiastic, being a good listener, patient, provides a long-term perspective, honest, and commitment to spend time as a mentor.

How to identify and work with a mentor
- Connect with an established, high-quality individual who the mentee can identify with about career path development (basic scientist/clinician)
- Establish and set short and long-term goals (grants, papers, students, postdoctoral fellows, meeting, etc.)
- Decide the frequency of meetings; bi-monthly, yearly, informally over coffee, lunch, etc.
- Inform Department Head and get approval of a selected mentor by the Department Head
- Establish realistic goals and expectations annually for performance review
- Keep track of personal success and failures and revisit to ensure plan is on track
- Develop informal meetings of mentor, mentee, and Department Head to discuss career progression and development of research program
- Correct path with appropriate remediation as required

Grant Writing

Grant writing is a learned skill that develops over time. Mentors may provide guidance and feedback when it comes to preparing your application submission to granting agencies. Also, attending a class or course in grant writing may be useful prior to submitting your application to a granting agency.

MMSF LEGACY AWARDS

Shaun Lamoureux Best Overall Award

The Shaun Lamoureux Best Overall Award is for the best research operating grant in the annual Research Operating Grant Competition. This award is presented annually to a Principal Investigator(s) who received the highest overall score in the competition. It may be shared in the event of a tie. Selection is based on the quality of the written grant application, oral presentation, response to questions, the external reviewer's comments, and the resulting overall adjudication score of the adjudication panel. The award is valued in the amount of $1,000.00 (CAD) as a supplement to the awarded grant amount.

Kerry Bittner Communications Award

The Kerry Bittner Communication Award is for the best communicator in the annual Research Operating Grant Competition. This award is presented annually to a Principal Investigator(s) who receives the highest overall communication score in the competition. It may be shared in the event of a tie. Selection is based on the quality of the oral/visual presentation to the MMSF adjudication panel. The award is valued in the amount of $1,000.00 (CAD) as a supplement to the awarded grant amount.

Criteria to consider for adjudication will include:

1. Clarity of Message
   The organization of the research proposal and the ability to verbally explain in particular the Lay Person and Knowledge Translation portions of the application.
2. Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication
   Clarity of speech, including timeliness within the 15 minutes allocated in the interview presentation, comfortable pace, engagement with the audience, energy and enthusiasm and appropriate non-verbal communication cues.
3. Visual Communication
   The originality, readability and appropriateness of slides or visual presentation materials.
4. Receptive and Expressive Communication
   The overall impression of the message and the ability to understand and respond to questions, so consequently the expected ability to address the media.