

Reviewing for CIHR: Why? Who? How? When?

Q: Who can qualify to be on a CIHR panel?

A: Anyone who holds a CIHR grant or similar major peer-reviewed grant.

Q: Is there a job description?

A: Typically, a grant review panel member is assigned 15-20 grants to review, some as first or second reviewer (requiring a 2-3 page written appraisal) and some as reader (requiring familiarity with the grant but not a written review). With experience, each grant review can be completed in about two hours, so this is a major time commitment. Grants panels meet twice each year, usually for two days each time and grants are sent out several weeks ahead of time. Reviewers usually sit on a panel for about three years (6 review meetings) but shorter stints are possible. More details can be found at: <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/4656.html> for grants and <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/23467.html> for awards.

Q: What happens at the panel meetings?

A: The meetings run from about 8 AM to 6 PM the first day and usually finish by mid afternoon the second day. Panel members typically fly to Ottawa the night before the panel meeting, and head home late on the second day. (There are exceptions, with some panels meeting for only one day, and some, on rare occasions, for three days.) The interactions are collegial, fun and intellectually stimulating, and usually include opportunities for panel members to meet informally, outside of the review sessions. All expenses are paid.

Q: Can I submit a grant to my own panel?

A: Yes. If the grant is sent to your own panel, you will be asked to skip that meeting and resume your reviewing responsibilities at the following meeting. In some cases there are two panels (Health Services Research A and B, for example), so your grant would go to the other panel.

Q: What do I get paid?

A: Sorry, this is an unpaid volunteer experience. Your expenses are fully covered and all meals are provided. You get a stimulating, fun experience and know exactly what you need to put in your next grant.

Q: Is the primary care perspective valued at CIHR?

A: Each panel member contributes knowledge based on his or her content expertise, which is usually quite focused, so the input of a generalist is often very welcome. For example, a generalist knowledge of low risk obstetrics, palliative care, screening and undifferentiated symptoms may be otherwise unavailable in pertinent discussions. Other panel members are often quite appreciative of your knowledge and contribution.

Q: OK, if I want to take the leap, how do I apply?

A: Go to <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/13820.html> and look for your area of interest. Health Services Evaluation and Interventions Research; Public, Community and Population Health; Knowledge Transfer and Exchange; and Psychosocial, Sociocultural and Behavioural Determinants of Health would be of high relevance to a generalist Family Medicine researcher. Email the person responsible for your selected content area.

Q: What are chances they'll ask me?

A: If you hold a major grant, your chances of being approached are excellent.

Q: What if I don't hold a major grant?

A: In the past CIHR has sometimes allowed observers at the panel meetings, so it's worth asking. You can also ask a colleague who sits on a panel to help review her/his grants and get feedback on how you did.
