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NSERC 1502 - Biological Systems and Functions Evaluation Group

Expertise: neuroendocrinology of social and non social learning – in mice
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NOI:

What it is for

- After the initial phase it is not seen again. Not part of the evaluation.
- Used by NSERC science bureaucrats to assign evaluation panel
 - choose your title/keywords carefully
- Used by internal evaluators to determine their own comfort ratings
 - Ratings used to assign internal evaluators (1, 2, 3,4, 5) to grants
- Used by internal evaluators to assign external reviewers
 - Choose your reviewers carefully
 - I recommend Canadians familiar with NSERC – not CIHR

What to write

- Write for a scientist but also the science bureaucrats at NSERC
- No details – broad stroke ideas of what you want to do
- Listing specific aims helps but not necessary
- Research plan not binding. You can change it when you write the full proposal

A GENERAL COMMENT

- Your NSERC score is based of 3 components each with equal weight
 - You – your CCV
 - Your HQP – past and training plan
 - Your research proposal

Make sure you develop all 3 – don't over-focus on your research proposal and rush the rest – you will pay for it

Also: integrate them – don't treat them as separate entities – e.g. incorporate HQP training in your research plan + highlight HQPs in your CCV

Researcher: CCV + researcher part in NSERC form

- Non-NSE (e.g. CIHR) publications are **not counted**. We actively discount them - if you can, avoid medical terms in your titles – if you have them, explain why a certain article is NOT medical
- **Explain explain explain** - the onus is on you – evaluators can't seek additional info. E.g.
 - this is a top J in my field... big deal... lead to multiple conference invitations... etc
 - list of authors, explain role well e.g. importance of last position
 - your role when not 1st or last author – a good place to emphasize collaborations
- Quantity: give **numbers** – your evaluators are scientists too – scientists like numbers
- Quality: Indicate **IF and Citation index/counts** – nobody likes them but people understand them
- Clearly mark **HQPs** on publications in CCV
- List also conference contributions – **dissemination** - it looks bad when they are not there
- Emphasize contribution to your field as indicators of quality (honors, awards, J editor, etc)
- Non-publication contributions count too. Much less, though
- Teaching does not count – not an 'excuse' for low publication record
- COVID-19 is a valid reason – do explain its impact– e.g. lab shut down, family obligations
- 'Legit' leaves parental, medical, sabbatical do count. List them + explain impact

HQP:

- Emphasize them **everywhere**: CV, HQP part (obviously) and research **proposal**
- list them all, undergrads and lab techs included - untrue only grads and post docs count
- give **numbers** – your evaluators are scientists too – scientists like numbers – don't make them count
- 1st time applicants: list all supervisory experience you may have had, including your peers – provide explanations.
- On site supervisions for field work: list those too – techs, students, volunteers, locals – explain
- Don't forget the HQPs in your colleagues' labs. Don't list in CCV unless you are a co-advisor, but do mention in statement 'in addition to HQPs I directly supervise xx number of HQPs in collaborating labs also receive training in ... in my lab'
- Skills: don't forget soft skills (e.g. planning, organizing, leadership, team work, problem solving...)
- Emphasize marketability for academia **and** non-academia – provide examples of past students
- Equity Diversity Inclusion (EDI): don't just say it's important - they know it is, that's why they want it. Identify barriers. The provide **concrete examples** of how you promote (recruit) and facilitate it (once in your lab how you accommodate for diverse people). E.g. allow flexible hours to accommodate for diverse cultures/family obligations. Take specific sensitivity courses (yourself and all lab members). Advertise positions in diversity group platforms
- Use gender-neutral pronouns for future HQPs e.g. a A new PhD student... they will...

Proposal:

- **Program** vs project
- **NOT medical** - If it smells like medical explicitly say why it isn't
- If similar to funded CIHR research explicitly say why it is a separate program (not project!)
- Don't say you need an NSERC grant to collect preliminary data for a CIHR application. 😊
- Clearly spell out long- (beyond grant) and short- (next 5 yr) term objectives
- A reasonable number of objectives (2-4), realistic. Neither too ambitious nor too limited
- Write for a scientist but not a top expert in your field
- **Sex/gender** make it part of your proposal – formulate specific hypotheses – not an afterthought
- Relevance: open with it and remind your reader throughout. Why important to answer this Q?
- Novelty: ditto – remind your reader throughout: emphasize conceptual novelty, not methods
- Feasibility – especially for first time applicants
 - No 'aim 2 depends upon findings in aim 1' – ever – aims must be connected but parallel
 - List collaborators for techniques you haven't done/published yet. If already published together point that out – don't count on the evaluators/reviewers to dig that info from your CCV
- Detail: Enough to demonstrate feasibility - Not so many that it looks like a project (vs program) – cite your own work: we'll do this as in...

What evaluators are asked to look for (make it easy for them to find):

- Excellence of the researcher
 - Knowledge, expertise, and experience of the researcher in the NSE
 - Quality and impact of contributions to the proposed research and/or other areas of research in the NSE
 - Importance of contributions to, and use by, other research and end-users
- Contributions to the training of highly qualified personnel
 - Quality and impact of past training
 - Training environment
 - HQP awards and research contributions
 - Outcomes and skills gained by HQP
 - Quality, suitability and clarity of the planned training
 - Training philosophy
 - Mentorship approach and enhancement of the research and training environment
 - Challenges or barriers to inclusion and advancement of under-represented groups
 - Planned approach to promote participation of a diverse group of HQP
 - Research training plan for individual HQP

What evaluators are asked to look for:

- Merit of the proposal
 - Originality and innovation
 - Significance and expected contributions to NSE research; ~~potential for policy and/or technology related impact~~
 - Clarity and scope of objectives
 - Clarity and appropriateness of methodology
 - Feasibility
 - Extent to which the scope of the proposal addresses all relevant issues
 - Consideration of **sex, gender and diversity** in the research design, if applicable to the field
 - Consideration of interdisciplinary methods or practices in research
 - Appropriateness of, and justification for, the budget
 - Demonstration that the DG proposal is **distinct** conceptually from research supported (or submitted for support) through **CIHR** and/or SSHRC
 - Clear explanation why **DG** funding is essential to carry out the research proposed in the DG application (for applicants who hold or receive funds from a **CIHR** Foundation Grant)

I'd be happy to share my grant application and answer any questions

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