Reviewer in Training Program

Mentor Guide

Objective

This guide has been designed as a resource to help Mentors navigate the mentorship process and create a valuable and formative experience for Mentees participating in the Reviewer in Training (RiT) program. Not all Mentors will also be committee executives, but mentorship is part of the expectations of being a committee Chair. In addition to this guide, Mentors should ensure they are familiar with the specific roles and responsibilities of Mentees and Mentors throughout the Project Grant competition. For questions and feedback about this guide and the RiT Program, contact college@cihr-irsc.gc.ca.

Background

The CIHR Reviewer in Training (RiT) program offers Early Career Researchers (ECRs) a learning opportunity to gain a better understanding of the elements of high-quality review and the peer review process. RiT participants can do this by selecting either the role of a Mentee, or ECR Reviewer in their initial application.

Mentees participate in the Project Grant competition with the support of a Mentor. They write practice reviews on up to three applications, attend the peer review meeting, present one review, and participate in the committee discussions.

ECR Reviewers participate in the same capacity as all reviewers without the support of a Mentor, but with access to the supportive resources that CIHR provides to committee members. They have a reduced number of applications to review (up to five) and are able to present their assigned applications later in the meeting.

Mentors are experienced reviewers who guide and support Mentees as they participate in the RiT Program during the Project Grant competition. They offer review quality feedback on up to three Mentee practice reviews, which includes ensuring that reviews identify strengths and weaknesses for each evaluation criterion. Mentors guide their Mentees in preparing to attend the peer review meeting, prepare them to present one of their reviews, and give general direction on how to participate in the committee discussions. Mentorship concludes prior to the committee meeting but Mentors are encouraged to debrief with their Mentees afterwards.

Canada

Introduction

As a Mentor in the RiT Program, your goal is to guide a Mentee towards becoming a peer reviewer who can produce high-quality reviews. You should provide your Mentee with a comprehensive understanding of what the peer review process entails at CIHR. In turn, they must have clear goals and be willing to accept guidance and advice throughout the program in order for the mentorship to be successful.

There are five parts to this guide:

1. **Preparing for mentorship**
2. **Communicating with your Mentee**
3. **Providing feedback**
4. **Premeeting preparation**
5. **Post-meeting debrief**

1. Preparing for Mentorship

Mentors are assigned a Mentee by CIHR staff in collaboration with committee executives. Once you have been introduced to your Mentee, please make yourself available to answer any questions they might have. You can communicate via email, video chat, or through the MS Teams private channel set up for you by CIHR staff.

Mentors are expected to read and assess their Mentee's practice reviews prior to the meeting, and to provide constructive feedback on review quality. We ask Mentors to ensure that they are familiar with the review quality guidelines.

Mentees are provided with a list of learning materials to complete at the beginning of the RiT Program (Appendix A); they may ask questions related to these learning materials, or have additional questions related to the peer review process. It is important to remember that Mentees may not have received federal funding and may have questions about the grant funding process.

While this information isn't specifically included in the learning materials package, the grants funding process can be difficult to navigate, and your Mentee might ask you for clarification on some aspects. You can help your Mentee understand these various aspects, which might include, the Application Administration Guide, DORA, the new Clinical Trials Policy, TCPS-2, the Project Grant Program Funding Decision Process, Indigenous Health Research, EDI and Peer Review related commitments in the current Strategic Plan, etc. Importantly, you do not need to have all the

2. Communicating with your Mentee

Once a Mentee has been assigned to you, you should reach out to establish contact. You can set up an initial meeting using the MS Teams private channel, or you may choose to communicate in another way (you can use the Communication Plan at the end of this document to help organize this). For any issues in this process, reach out to the committee coordinator for assistance.

During your initial discussion, your Mentee may ask to review the following:

✓ Their career goals and why they are interested in the peer review process.
✓ Their understanding of the peer review process.
✓ Deadlines for submitting practice reviews and discussing feedback.
✓ What is included in a high-quality review.

Communication in action

Communication is a vital part of the Mentor-Mentee relationship. As a Mentor, you are there to listen, provide feedback and help the Mentee improve their peer review skills. Be aware that your Mentee might be inexperienced with some aspects of peer review. Consider their concerns objectively and respond honestly. Guide them towards a solution by asking questions and giving advice. Additionally, you may seek support from CIHR staff on questions related to peer review at any time.

Example

Mentee: *"I completed the review of my first application today which ended up being more difficult than I expected it to be. I am worried the committee will think the review is poor quality and will give me a poor rating in the program."*

Mentor: *"I'm glad you raised this to me - it is perfectly normal to feel this way. Let's set some extra time aside to go over your review together a few times before the meeting so we can address the points you feel are particularly challenging. You can also present your review to me to get more comfortable before you present at the meeting."*

3. Providing feedback

When giving feedback on your Mentee's written practice reviews, consider the following:

✓ Are all sections of the review complete?
✓ Do their reviews highlight strengths and weaknesses for all [adjudication criteria](#)?
✓ Have they provided written comments evaluating sex (as a biological variable) and/or gender (as a sociocultural factor) in all appropriate sections of their reviews?
✓ What was their general decision-making process and how did it lead to their choice of scores?
✓ Have they written the reviews using [gender-neutral and gender-inclusive language](#)?
✓ Do any of their comments demonstrate bias that might contribute to peer review inequities?
✓ Do they meet the review quality expectations as outlined in the [Review Quality Checklist](#)?
✓ Have they [considered a broad range of research contributions](#) beyond journal-based metrics as recommended by DORA?
✓ Does their Summary of Research Proposal use original wording and demonstrate their understanding of the work being proposed?
✓ Are there other considerations specific to your committee that should be included in their reviews (such as Indigenous Health Research or Global Health Research)?

The feedback provided should focus on review quality as outlined in the [Review Quality web page](#). Scientific opinions and/or merit of an application should not be the focus in any of the mentorship discussions. After you have reviewed your Mentee's practice reviews, you should set up a meeting to discuss and give them an opportunity to ask questions about your feedback.

Feedback in action

Offering constructive criticism is essential to helping your Mentee progress toward their goals.

When doing this:

✓ Ensure to identify and reinforce things they did well
✓ Draw on your own experiences to show empathy and understanding
✓ Offer specific guidance to improve their work

4. Preparing for the committee meeting

To avoid distracting from the peer review process, formal mentorship ends before the committee meeting. You will not be able to answer questions or communicate directly with your Mentee during that period. As a result, you should make sure to provide your Mentee with all necessary information related to the structure, function and conduct of the panel in advance of the meeting. Topics to review with your Mentee might include:

✓ Who will be in attendance and how the committee meeting typically proceeds.
✓ Preparing relevant, high-level notes for presenting assigned applications, and not reciting written reviews.
✓ Ensuring they provide strengths and/or weaknesses that address all adjudication criteria and sex and/or gender considerations.
✓ Familiarizing themselves with other reviewers' scores and written feedback for their assigned applications, paying attention to divergent scores.
✓ Keeping to the allotted presentation times (5 min for primary, 2-3 min for secondary reviewers).
✓ Remaining open, respectful, and considerate when discussing applications and no monopolizing the conversation.
✓ Advice for engaging in discussions about applications they did not review.
✓ How to participate in the meeting if their review(s) were streamlined.
✓ Any other committee-specific considerations, if applicable.

5. Post-meeting debrief

While not part of the formal mentorship process, if your workloads and schedules allow, you are encouraged to meet with your Mentee after the committee meeting to discuss their experience. You might review issues related to your specific committee, or any of the following:

✓ Their presentation of the review(s), if applicable, and if it met the required discussion points for an appropriate assessment of the application.
✓ Their overall engagement and participation in the committee discussions focusing on professionalism and meaningful and constructive contribution.
✓ Any other questions or comments they had regarding the committee meeting.

Communication Plan

This plan is a tool used to help organize your mentorship. By agreeing on specific dates and goals, you will be better equipped to listen, learn, and engage.

Mentor:

Contact Information:

Mentee:

Contact Information:

Committee:

Committee Meeting Date:

Task	Description	Mentee-Mentor Agreed response
Plan communication	What methods of communication will you use to communicate with each other? (Email, MS Teams, etc.)	
Create a schedule	What dates and times do you want to meet? (Review feedback, post-meeting debrief, etc.)	
Plan activities	What do you want to discuss during your mentorship meetings? (Full feedback on your practice reviews, run through the committee meeting process, practice your presentation, etc)	

Appendix A

The list of learning materials Mentees receive at the beginning of the RiT Program:

- ✓ The Reviewer in Training Program webpage
- ✓ Mandatory learning for Project Grant reviewers
- ✓ Mandatory learning for Project Grant reviewers in the Indigenous Health Research (IHR) committee
- ✓ Recommended learning modules:
    - o CIHR 101 eLearning Series:
        - ✓ Part 1 of 2: Introduction to CIHR (20 min.)
        - ✓ Part 2 of 2: Peer Review at CIHR (20 min.)
- ✓ Quality Assurance practices in CIHR Peer Review
- ✓ Review Quality Checklist
- ✓ Best Practices in Peer Review
- ✓ The RiT Program webinar
- ✓ The peer review manual for the Project Grant competition