

**University of Manitoba**  
**Process for Assessing SCIENTIFIC Merit**  
**of Projects funded from Non-Peer Reviewed Sources**  
**Approved by the Committee on Animal Care,**  
**March 25 2022**

**Background:**

In accordance with Canadian Council on Animal Care and University of Manitoba Policy: Animal Care and Use, all research projects involving the use of animals must be peer reviewed for scientific merit. Research projects funded by the major national and provincial granting agencies such as CIHR, NSERC, NCI, Heart and Stroke and MHRC use expert peer reviewers to assess scientific merit. The institution may also choose to accept ratings from granting agency committees that fall above the fundable cut-off as evidence of scientific merit, even where funding has not been granted.

In cases where a project is funded from smaller foundations (local, national, or international) or an industrial source where peer-review for scientific merit has been conducted, documentation regarding the dates of review, the composition of the scientific panel and a brief description of the review process must be provided by the investigator upon request for evaluation by the Associate Vice-President (Research) (AVPR). In the case of reviews done within a private company (contract research), there should be at least two scientific experts on the assessment panel.

However, in cases in which the project is funded from non-peer reviewed sources such as internal departmental/faculty/institute funds, or from a private industrial source (contract research), it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to initiate an appropriate peer review process with the animal care coordinator. This involves identifying individuals, internal and external to the University to review and comment on the merit of proposed work. At the request of the investigator, a non-disclosure or confidentiality agreement can be arranged with the reviewers. Note: In cases of industrial/private company (contract research), if it is deemed that their merit review process is adequate, this will count as one external merit review. One additional internal merit review will still be required.

The Chair of the Animal Care Committee (ACC) does have the option to request additional peer review on any submitted protocol, regardless of the agency funding and the status of peer review. This option is rarely exercised and only used if there is a serious concern by the majority of the members of the ACC regarding the particulars of the animal model or experimental design not related directly to the merit of the general scientific content.

**Requirements:**

The Animal Care Committees (ACC) must ensure that no animals are acquired or used for science without prior approval of an animal use protocol. The animal use protocol must indicate whether or not the proposed project has undergone scientific merit review. The peer review process should be initiated prior to submission of the protocol to the ACC. Final protocol approval will not be granted until successful scientific merit is in place.

**Information Required from the Principal Investigator for the Scientific Merit Review Process:**

**It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to provide the AVPR the following:**

- 1) A project description that explains the objectives, hypotheses, potential contributions, and methodological approach of the study.
- 2) Justification of the proposed animal model and the description of the experimental design (including the time lines if applicable) and identification of sample size for each of the proposed experiments.

This description should be no less than one page and no more than five pages.

### **Recommending Appropriate Reviewers:**

The names, addresses (land and email) and phone numbers for **two internal (external to the PI's department meaning person whose primary appointment is external to the PI's unit) and two external referees**. While only two reviews (one internal, one external to the university) will be solicited, the 4 names provided allows the AVPR to select reviewers or should a reviewer be unable to comply then an alternative can be contacted with little delay. As indicated above, in cases of industrial/private company (contract research), if it is deemed that their merit review process is adequate, this will count as one external merit review. One additional internal merit review will still be required.

### **Managing the Review and Approval Process:**

The animal care coordinator will send out the request to the selected reviewers. The requested reviewers will be asked to complete the [scientific merit peer review form](#).

Questions or concerns raised by the reviewers will be communicated to the investigator for comment which in turn will be forwarded to the respective reviewers and the AVPR. If both peer reviewers are in agreement that the proposed project is meritorious, it will be deemed as such by the AVPR; otherwise, the project will be rejected.

### **Conflict of Interest:**

Conflict of interest guidelines for selection of reviewers exclude individuals who:

- 1) Would receive professional or personal benefit resulting from the funding opportunity or application being reviewed;
- 2) Has a professional or personal relationship with the applicant or co-applicant;
- 3) Is in a position to gain or lose scientifically or financially from the outcome of the application;
- 4) Is from the same immediate department (meaning person whose primary appointment is in the same department as the applicant);
- 5) Has collaborated, published or been a co-applicant with the applicant within the last five years;
- 6) Has been a student or supervisor of the applicant within the last ten years;
- 7) Has long standing scientific or personal differences with the applicant;
- 8) Feels that they cannot provide an objective review of the application for any other reason.

Major revisions made April 14 2022.