



Tri Agency / CARA Session Summary

May 20, 2020

Once again, I want to convey my thanks to CIHR, NSERC and SSHRC for proposing the session, and for taking the time to participate. Special thanks to Adrian Mota, Marc Fortin, and Dominique Bérubé for their leadership on behalf of the Agencies. I also want to thank CARA members for providing questions prior to the session and for engaging throughout the session. A video of the session is available here (<https://sshrcvideo.webex.com/recording/service/sites/sshrcvideo/recording/playback/748413246e294b4bbf8db7db1a9363d8>) and the recording password is bCuWJHr8

We know that our members have several questions that may not be answered at this time or may be specific to their own situation. The Agencies are working very hard to address questions and we know that things continue to evolve and change rapidly. The Agencies and institutions are looking to be as flexible as possible to ensure that research can continue to move forward at this critical time.

Please continue to review the Agencies' websites and contact them directly with questions. We would welcome you sharing the information with CARA members through the listserv. CARA, CIHR, NSERC, and SSHRC will continue to explore ways to communicate together.

Review of proposals and impacts of COVID-19 re feasibility and whether to include contingency plans

Feasibility is a factor in the review of all grant proposals. It is up to the PI to explain their research and methods and to make the case for the importance and value of the research. It is up to the PI to decide whether they will consider alternatives in terms of data collection for example, or dissemination, as a result of potential disruptions due to COVID-19 and whether or not to include those alternatives. A PI may approach this differently depending on the length of the grant (5 years vs 1 year) but it remains their call to describe how they will undertake the research in ways that allow and enable the research to move forward. Agencies are not asking for reviewers to consider feasibility with a COVID-19 lens for projects that were submitted prior to the pandemic and SSHRC Connection grants are not being evaluated differently in light of social distancing practices. For future competitions, applicants should address the feasibility of their research within the application, and if relevant, applicants can choose whether to specifically address COVID-19. The Agencies are working to ensure that it is clear to reviewers what the expectations are for any competition, and to ensure that those expectations are applied consistently. Applicants can also address the impact of COVID-19 on productivity and career progression in those sections.

Extensions

For CIHR, one-year extensions (time only) will be granted for projects with end dates up to March 31, 2021. For SSHRC, one-year extensions (time only) can be granted for projects with end dates up to March 31, 2021.

For NSERC (with the exception of Discovery Grants – see below), research award holders can request a one-year extension in time only. For Discovery Grants holders, NSERC offers the possibility of a funded one-year extension. NSERC expects to contact eligible Discovery Grant recipients and RGOs regarding implementation of a one-year funded extension around mid-June. As the crises continues, each of the Agencies will look at the whether and how to extend further. For CIHR, some grant holders have been offered a funded extension as well as an extension in time. SSHRC is not offering funded extensions. If a PI elects to extend their grant by a year, they would fall under the same rules in terms of eligibility to apply for a new grant as they would have if they had requested a formal one-year extension.

Future competitions and available funds

At this point, it is too early to determine that funding levels for regular competitions will be different than what has been planned for. New opportunities related to COVID-19 research have been launched with a combination of new and existing funding.

Early Career Researcher status

The Agencies are exploring whether there may be an extension for the timing around early career researchers given the COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers are currently able to address situations where productivity was reduced (e.g., parental leave) in the special circumstances section, and researchers can use that section to address and productivity issues related to COVID-19.

New funds for research personnel

The Agencies are continuing to work with the federal government with regard to the recent announcements of additional funds to help cover salaries and benefits of research personnel (trainees, staff). Information will be provided to the research community once it is available.

Sincerely,



Deborah Zornes, PhD
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President, CARA