

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES AND APPROACHES ON PEER/ MERIT REVIEW 2018

Preamble

In 2012 the Global Research Council (GRC) endorsed its first statement of principles on scientific merit review, also referred to as 'peer review', following a Global Summit on Merit Review hosted by the U.S. National Science Foundation¹.

In 2018 the GRC revisited the topic of merit review and revised the Statement of Principles to ensure they remained relevant and reflected the changing strategic context and evolving nature of the global research enterprise².

These revised Statement of Principles are intended to provide worldwide agreement on the core, high-level principles necessary for a rigorous and transparent review system. Adherence to them is therefore a central prerequisite for building trust between trans-nationally collaborating funding agencies and also serves as the foundation for tolerance to differences in the peer/merit review system.

Principles

Expert Assessment

Collectively, reviewers should have the appropriate knowledge and expertise to assess the proposal both at the level of the broad context of the research field(s) to which it contributes and with respect to the specific objectives and methodology. Reviewers should be selected according to clear criteria. Appropriate review mechanisms that are sensitive and responsive to the purpose and potential impact of interdisciplinary research should be established.

Transparency

Decisions must be based on clearly described rules, procedures and assessment criteria that are published in advance. All eligible proposals should be treated in the same manner. Applicants should receive appropriate feedback on the review of their proposal.

Impartiality

Proposals must be assessed fairly and on their merit and in the context of other national and international research. It must be ensured that assessments are free from biases (regional, historical, gender, ethnicity, religious denominations and political opinions).

Conflicts of interest must be declared and managed according to defined, published processes. Guidance and training to staff and peer reviewers must be provided on both the definition and the management of conflict of interest and potentially unconscious bias.

Appropriateness

The peer/ merit review process applied must be appropriate for the research area and call objectives with respect to the size and complexity of the call.

¹ Statement of Principles for Scientific Merit Review, Global Research Council, 2012

² For more information see accompanying 'Background Paper on the Revision of the Global Research Council Statement of Principles and Approaches on Scientific Merit Review, Global Research Council, 2018

Confidentiality

All proposals, including related data, intellectual property and other documents, must be treated in confidence by reviewers and organizations involved in the review process.

Integrity and Ethical Considerations

The responsible conduct of research is at the very essence of the scientific process and is intrinsic to society's trust in science. Therefore, ethics and integrity are paramount to the review process.

Gender, Equality and Diversity

The quality of science depends on the inclusion of the brightest minds in our society, and the quality of the review process will be improved by exploiting the talent and resources offered by underrepresented groups such as women, early career researchers, and members of all ethnicities.

Additional Considerations

The above principles pertain to the peer/merit review process. While these principles state that proposals must be evaluated according to clear criteria that are published in advance, the GRC recognizes that additional considerations may be considered which are not universal and may vary depending on the particular scope of the programme or call. Next to the criterion of scientific quality, which will almost always apply, additional criteria may be used along the following lines of recommendation.

Where appropriate, applicants should be encouraged to consider the potential broader impacts of their research. In such cases, funders should consider asking applicants to address these impacts and provide information on how this information will be considered during the review process. Impact should be conceptualised broadly within the definition of merit/peer review.

Funders should develop ways to balance risk in review processes to ensure that potentially transformative and high risk/ high reward research proposals can be fairly considered.

Where appropriate, proposals should be assessed by international reviewers, particularly where proposals are either global in nature, addressing global challenges, or the focus of the research is on other countries.

A note on distinguishing between Peer and Merit Review

The terms Peer and Merit Review are often used interchangeably, and sometimes have slightly different meaning for participants of the Global Research Council.

For some participants the term Merit Review is used to distinguish the wider assessment of the merits of a proposal, beyond just the 'peer review' of scientific excellence by scientific peers, such as the potential relevance to beneficiaries or potential impact of the proposal.

Other participants simply use the term Peer Review to describe the assessment of proposals by relevant 'experts' depending on the nature of the project, scope of the call, or organisational mandate. In such cases, while the assessment of scientific excellence by scientific peers remains central, where appropriate, it can also incorporate assessment of the wider 'merits' of the proposal by other qualified non-academic experts or peers.

The Global Research Council recognises the different use of the terms by participant organisations. Therefore, the principles and actions set out in this Statement are intended to be applicable regardless.