Implementing & Evaluating An Internal Peer Review Process - What Have We Learned?
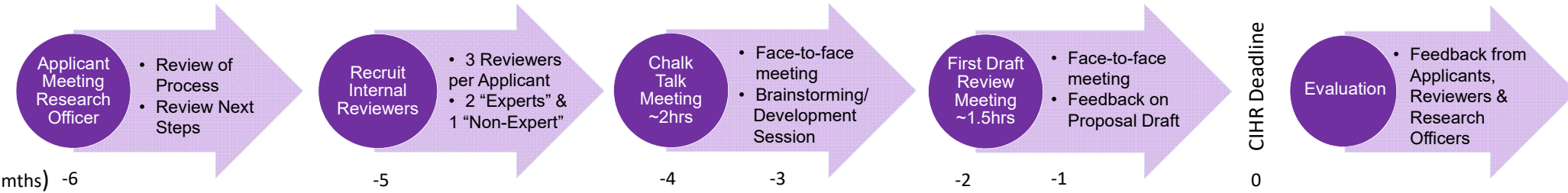
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Internal Peer Review (IPR) Process Overview

Process flow (mths):
- **Applicant Meeting Research Officer** (-6): Review of Process; Review Next Steps
- **Recruit Internal Reviewers** (-5): 3 Reviewers per Applicant; 2 "Experts" & 1 "Non-Expert"
- **Chalk Talk Meeting ~2hrs** (-4 to -3): Face-to-face meeting; Brainstorming/Development Session
- **First Draft Review Meeting ~1.5hrs** (-2 to -1): Face-to-face meeting; Feedback on Proposal Draft
- **CIHR Deadline** (0)
- **Evaluation**: Feedback from Applicants, Reviewers & Research Officers

Implementation
- Initial Implementation began with 2 Pilots of the Process for CIHR Open Operating Competitions (Sept. 2013 & Mar. 2014); Since then 3 additional rounds have been completed, 1 is in progress
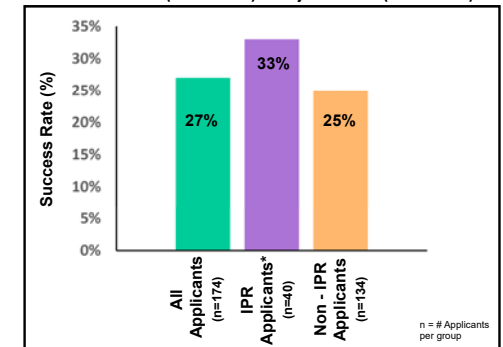- Revisions to the process made based on feedback received from applicants & reviewers

Process Evaluation: Participant Feedback

	BENEFITS	CHALLENGES / SUGGESTIONS for IMPROVEMENT
Overall Process	• Engagement by reviewers much better than if just ask colleagues • Particularly useful for junior faculty, as both applicant and reviewer • Two-stage process is more effective than single stage • Very collegial, builds camaraderie and true feeling of collaboration	• Productive as long as the applicant is open to suggestions • Too much work for reviewers especially if also submitting grants • Process not good fit for all grants or individuals • Have reviewers send feedback in advance to focus discussion • Have one reviewer read only a more polished version of draft
Timing	• Timeline forces applicants to start well in advance of deadline • Allows time for applicant to collect additional preliminary data if needed and address weaknesses • Chalk talk allowed for feedback before actual writing began	• Formal scheduled meetings can be a challenge for participants due to competing priorities. Process should be flexible. • Getting materials to reviewers well in advance of the meetings (7-10 days minimum) can be a challenge
Review Committee	• Good combination of expertise and panel experience • Real value in having inter-disciplinary reviewers • Non-experts provided a fresh perspective	• Finding appropriate reviewers can be challenging • Reviewers need to be committed and engaged in entire process • Some reviewers do not provide feedback in collegial manner
Quality of Feedback	• Excellent feedback definitely improved my proposal • Feedback more representative of CIHR reviewer evaluations compared to feedback provided by colleagues • Helped us see what CIHR reviewers may find problematic • Feedback resulted in applicant not submitting to current round and gave time to strengthen grant for next round	• Feedback did not always address all advice being sought • Honest feedback not always provided if reviewers felt project didn't stand a chance or in attempt to be supportive/kind • May get more honest feedback if sent electronically • Challenge for reviewers to provide feedback when so many unknowns regarding the changing peer review system at CIHR
Impact on Reviewers	• Initiated collaboration as a result of review process • Learned grant strategies from other reviewers • Got to see how other reviewers evaluate grants • Learned about new CIHR programs/processes • Opportunity to give back to department and facilitate junior faculty success	• First draft session with all reviewers was cumbersome, especially if reviewers having differing opinions. One on one discussions with applicant may give them better feedback • Onerous for reviewer and not a sound investment of reviewer's time, particularly if not an expert in the field • Request for compensation for participating as a reviewer

Would you Participate in the Process Again?

- Yes- As Applicant: 9%
- Yes- As Reviewer: 23%
- Yes- As Both: 67%
- No: 1%
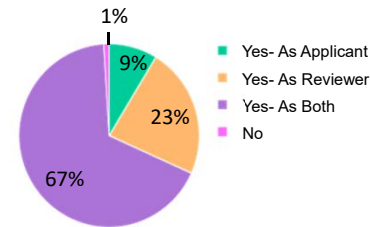
Preliminary Evaluation of Process Impact – CIHR T-OOG (March 2015) & Project Scheme (March 2016)

Success Rate (%):
- All Applicants (n=174): 27%
- IPR Applicants* (n=40): 33%
- Non-IPR Applicants (n=134): 25%

n = # Applicants per group

*Applicants who have participated in IPR at least once since 2013

Summary of Lessons Learned
- Process is labor intensive for participants and research officers (RO time ~16hrs/applicant)
- Applicants feel they benefit from the process; **95%** would recommend the process to their colleagues
- Potential Reviewer Benefits: Learning new information, forming new collaboration with Applicant, opportunity to support colleagues
- Flexibility in the process is needed to accommodate needs of Applicant
- Timing is Critical – Better if Applicant begins the process early (4-6 mths prior to deadline)
- Matching of Applicant to Reviewers is key
- Applicants must be open to feedback for maximum benefit
- Feedback from Non-Experts can be advantageous (more representative of current CIHR environment)
- Preliminary data suggest that process increases Applicant's chance of funding success