



## UNIVERSITY ANIMAL CARE COMMITTEE

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### **Policy on Peer Review for Scientific Merit**

The CCAC *Policy Statement for Senior Administrators Responsible for Animal Care and Use Programs (2008)* states that it is the institution's responsibility to have in place a mechanism to ensure that proposed animal use for research is independently peer-reviewed for its scientific merit before it is given final approval by the animal care committee (ACC).

#### Requirements:

Research protocols submitted for approval must indicate whether the project has been peer-reviewed for scientific merit. Where the applicant confirms that an independent peer review has not been undertaken, arrangements for arm's length peer-review must be made and the review successfully completed before the protocol is approved by the University Animal Care Committee (UACC).

For the purposes of this policy, an independent peer review is defined as the review of the research proposal by two or more researchers, who have the technical expertise to assess the science of the protocol and are at arm's length from the research team. The peer reviewers will assess the proposal and offer a recommendation as to whether or not the proposal has adequate scientific merit to justify the use of animals; however, reviewers will not consider the degree of compliance of the research methods with Queen's UACC policies.

#### Recommending Appropriate Reviewers:

To assure that the scientific review is at arm's length from the Principal Investigator and the UACC, the following terms and conditions for peer reviewers are required:

- Peer reviewers must be external to the research team and laboratory in which the protocol will be undertaken, and must not be directly involved in the protocol design or implementation.
- Reviewers should have appropriate experience and/or knowledge in the relevant field, discipline or sub-discipline to adequately review protocol content.
- Reviewers should not have published with the lead investigator in the past 6 years.
- Reviewers should not have been a research supervisor or graduate student of the lead investigator or any of the co-applicants, within the past six years.
- Reviewers should not be in any other potential conflict of interest (e.g., personal, financial).
- Recommendations for reviewers may be submitted for addition to the general reviewer pool.

#### Managing the Scientific Merit Review and Approval Process:

- A reviewer pool will be maintained by the UACC Coordinator. Suitable reviewers from this pool will be selected by staff within the Office of the Vice Principal (Research). The UACC Coordinator will approach the selected reviewers to provide written assessment of the proposed research. A scientific summary of the research protocol is sent for review, along with a reviewer comment form (see appendix 1) which includes a statement requesting declaration of the relationship between the reviewer and the Principal Investigator to ensure an arm's-length review. In addition, the reviewer must declare whether they are qualified to review the proposal.



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- Reviewer comments and recommendations are maintained on file by the UACC Coordinator, and the proposal is either rejected or accepted. Full protocol approval by the UACC is contingent upon scientific merit. If only two of three reviews are received, and these are in agreement, then the recommendation will stand. A third review is required where two reviews offer differing recommendations.

### Information Required from Investigators for Internal Peer Review Process:

Please provide information about the proposed research that will facilitate the scientific merit process. For this peer review, consider that the reviewer must establish both scientific merit of the research, as well as establish that the use of animals is warranted. **Provide adequate information for the reviewer to evaluate how the proposed use of animals at Queen's University will address the scientific question.** A 1-2 page summary of the work will usually be required.

- For grants that have been, or will be, submitted for funding this could include the one page summary of the proposed research that is required for NSERC, CIHR, or the equivalent for other granting bodies. Add pages as needed to ensure that the sections of the proposal relevant to the animal work are explained adequately, e.g., the methodology section.
- Grants that were unsuccessful in competition may have useful review comments or a summary by the Scientific Officer of the review panel. Consider submitting to the UACC the summary page, relevant sections of the proposal, and reviewer comments.



Appendix 1

Peer-Review for Scientific Merit Reviewer Form

The Canadian Council on Animal Care, which oversees animal use for research, teaching and testing, requires that all animal-based research projects receive scientific peer review from at least two independent experts prior to their approval by an Animal Care Committee.

The following set of questions will serve as a guideline for this review (please attach additional pages if necessary).

Title of Proposal: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Principal Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Reviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Reviewer Title and Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_

Appropriateness of Reviewer:

- Please state your confidence level (of ability) to assess the scientific merit of the proposal: High Satisfactory Low
Have you published with the Principal Investigator in the past 6 years? Yes No
Have you been a research supervisor or graduate student of the lead investigator within the past six years? Yes No
Do you have any other potential conflicts of interest (e.g., personal, financial, etc.)? Yes No

Comments: [Empty box]

Research Objectives

- 1. Are the objectives clearly described? Yes No

Comments: [Empty box]

- 2. Are the objectives realistically achievable, given the methodology and experimental design? Yes No



Comments:

3. Does the knowledge expected to be gained from this study have **scientific importance**?

Yes                  No

Comments:

**General comments on the study objectives:**

**Research Project Quality**

4. Do the proposed activities show evidence of good understanding of current **scientific literature** and **knowledge** of the issue?

Yes                  No

Comments:

5. Is the research **hypothesis/hypotheses** clearly formulated?

Yes                  No

Comments:

6. Is the **experimental design** appropriate to test the research hypothesis/hypotheses?

Yes                  No

Comments:

7. Are sufficient details provided in the methodology to evaluate the likelihood of successful **reproducibility**?

Yes                  No

Comments:

8. Is the proposed **statistical data analysis** appropriate for the experimental design described?



Yes

No

Comments:

**Overall impression (summarize your impression of the quality of research proposal and make any recommendations that you believe would be appropriate):**

**With regard to the scientific merit of the described research, please rate the proposed study.**

**Excellent;** approve "as is"

**Good;** minor revisions suggested as per the recommendations above

**Fair;** major revisions required as per the recommendations above

**Poor;** should not be pursued

*Thank you for completing this review; your generous assistance is greatly appreciated.*

**Signature:**

**Date:**