



# How to Get a CIHR Doctoral Award: A Student's Perspective

C. Meghan McMurtry

PhD Candidate, Dalhousie University

Centre for Pediatric Pain Research, IWK  
Health Centre



# Overview

- Background info
- Review of application
  - Training Expectations
  - Abstract and Proposed Training Program
  - Common CV
- Following submission
- Student perspective
  - Common oversights
  - Challenges
  - Tips, tips, and more tips



# Student Awards vs. Grants

**Grants** provide financial support for research projects

**Student awards** provide financial support for students

# Why you should apply

- Admission to graduate programs
- Your CV → your track record
- You need to eat
- The rich (tend to) get richer
- It may be a program requirement
- Practice for writing grants

Also benefits your supervisor(s)  
and your university



# Beginning Considerations

- What type of students/projects does CIHR fund?
- Get to know the website
- Get to know the forms



# The Application

- 1) Training Module
- 2) Common CV and attachments

# Training Module

- Starts out with mostly factoids – brief answers
  - E.g. areas of research, classification codes, sponsors
- Some sections aren't applicable
- Note: front page requires Department Head signature



# Training Expectations

*“Provide an overview describing how the training you expect to acquire will contribute to your productivity and to the research goals you hope to achieve.”*

# Training Expectations: Broken Down

Can break into sections (e.g., as below)

- Overview: broad view
- Program requirements: How training will benefit you. Why would someone chose:
  - your program?
  - your supervisor(s)?
  - your lab?

# Training Expectations (2)

- My research: what have you done? skills gained?
  - tell a story, integrate, provide focus
- Other research-related activities: what else are you up to?
  - e.g., training groups, committee work, KT work, supervision
- Conclusion: wrap it up

# Abstract

- Abstract has to be in lay terms
  - i.e., can your mother/roommate/grandfather understand it??
- Content: mini-hourglass
  - Broad → narrow → broad with implications



# Proposed Training Program

Section A: Title and summary of the research project. Limit: 1 page

*“Include the specific hypothesis of the research and describe the candidate’s role on the project. This summary should be written in general scientific language\*.”*

# Proposed Training Program

## Section A - Summary

- Title
- Intro
  - Remember: reviewers will likely NOT be pain experts
- Objectives & hypotheses
  - Clear and simple; if room, link to planned analyses
- Participants, Measures, Procedure

# Proposed Training Program

## Section A - Summary

### ■ Implications

- Why should anyone care about the results? Future work, link to broad picture (but be realistic)

### ■ Role of candidate

- Specify what you will do (e.g. lit review, research design, ethical approval, data collection, analysis, manuscripts, KT)



# Proposed Training Program

## Section B: Space, facilities, support available

- What kind of support and mentoring will you have?
- Team makeup: multidisciplinary?
- Funding?
- Where will you work?
- Where will the research be conducted? Is there space and technology available?



# Proposed Training Program

## Section C: Time

- Percentage of time to be spent on different activities
- Be realistic
- Common mistake: no time left for research!



# Common CV

External site with own registration, PIN  
Validated for CIHR

# CV Module

- Need full CVs for you, your supervisor(s)
- First page of Common CV requires signature
- Fitting activities into main part vs. **attachments**



# Common CV Attachment: Activities and Contributions

- Conference presentations (invited etc)
- Conferences attended, invited?
- Training institutes attended
- Supervision of students
- Educational sessions given
- Committee memberships
- Professional memberships
- ...

# Common CV Attachment: Publications

- Published refereed papers
- Submitted and in-press refereed papers
  - specify if provisionally accepted, accepted pending revisions etc
  - will need to attach “proof” of this type of status
  - send in any updates you receive



# Common CV: Publications (2)

- Conference presentations and presented abstracts
  - include submitted
- Other articles, chapters, reports
  - non-peer reviewed, for the government etc.

# Pheew! It's in

But ...  
what's  
happening?





# Scoring Components

- 1) “Achievements and Activities of the Candidate”
  - Grades, research experience, awards, publications
- 2) “Characteristics and Abilities of the Candidate”
  - Reference letters
- 3) “Research Training Environment”
  - Supervisor & training program

Criterion	Weights for each criterion	
<b>Achievements and Activities of the Candidate</b>		
Publication Activity	10 %	<b>35 %</b>
Other Research Activity	10 %	
Academic Performance	15 %	
<b>Characteristics and Abilities of the Candidate</b>		
Critical thinking Independence Perseverance Originality Organizational skills Interest in discovery Research Ability	40 %	<b>40 %</b>
<b>The Research Training Environment</b>		
Training program for the candidate	10 %	<b>25 %</b>
Scientific Activity	5 %	
Research resources	5 %	
Training record	5 %	

# The results are in!

## What you find out:

- Ranking in the competition
- Ranking in the committee
- Overall rating
- Reviewer comments

## Ratings:

4.5 - 4.9	outstanding
4.0 - 4.4	excellent
3.5 - 3.9	very good
3.0 - 3.4	good
2.0 - 2.9	average
1.0 - 1.9	below avg
0	not acceptable



# Student perspectives...

Pain in Child Health trainees

# Why didn't I know...

- the scoring criteria
- to publish my Honours thesis (or Master's thesis)
- the importance of publications
- to strategize my references
- that it would take sooooo long
- the supervisor factor
- the weighting of the research project



# The hardest part was...

- getting started
- having enough time!!
- the Common CV
- creating a research project from scratch
- clearly articulating research question and project
- adhering to page limit for research description

## The hardest part was...(2)

- dealing with online vs. paper forms
- knowing what to include, omit, condense, expand on
- details baby, details = an obsessive personality is sometimes a good thing
- running around
- waiting for the results

# Tips (1/5)

- Publish, publish, publish
- Attend info sessions given by CIHR
- Start (way) earlier than you think is necessary
- Get to know the CIHR website, associated forms
  - ResearchNET
  - Guide to Reviewers
  - Grants and Awards Guide (Training & Salary Award Programs)



## Tips (2/5)

- Carefully read eligibility criteria
- Use old applications as models
- Order extra copies of your transcripts (esp. undergrad)
- Choose referees carefully
- Determine the travel schedules of supervisors, referees, department head

## Tips (3/5)

- Make it easy for your referees
- Follow instructions! (aka don't irritate reviewers)
- If in doubt, call/email CIHR\*
- Avoid jargon and a lot of acronyms
- Simplify your writing
- Proofread, proofread, and proofread again

## Tips (4/5)

- Have others edit – your roommate, your supervisors, classmate from different area
- Use the space available
- Be realistic in funding years requested
- Set aside time from meetings etc. the day you will be sending it out
- Cognitive reframing (throughout process)
- Learn to market yourself and your ideas but be honest!

## Tips (5/5)

- Remember to whom you are applying and what their role is
- Co-supervision
- Check guidelines again
- Check package and signatures
- Help others!
- Read and use reviewer feedback\*\*\*

# The number one tip: Don't give up!!!!



# Acknowledgements



Patrick McGrath

Christine Chambers

PICH trainees and mentors



## Funding:

- IWK Category A Grant
- CIHR CGS Doctoral Award + research allowance
- CIHR STIHR Pain in Child Health stipend

## Contact:

Meghan McMurtry

Centre for Pediatric  
Pain Research - West

[mcmurtry@dal.ca](mailto:mcmurtry@dal.ca)

470-6769