

**Directives and Guidelines on ‘Code of Conduct’ for Members of
Various Research Selection and Review Committees
(Extramural/Intramural) of Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)**

1. Introduction and Purpose

ICMR is committed to ensure that the research proposals submitted for financial support under its various schemes are assessed objectively, impartially, and strictly in accordance with the established evaluation criteria. Peer review is executed by multidisciplinary Project Selection Committees (PSC) and Project Review Committees (PRC), which comprises of eminent subject experts. ICMR deeply values the expertise, scientific rigor, and time dedicated by these committee members to evaluate and enable the selection of high-quality research for financial support. The technical suggestions by these experts guides the selected/non-selected investigators to improve the quality of their research proposals.

Therefore, it is essential to ensure the integrity of the peer-review framework by preventing any breach in confidentiality, eliminating conflicts of interest, and avoiding any external influence/s. It is fundamental to maintain a decorum during these meetings with positive and welcoming attitude and

mutual respect among the experts, investigators, and ICMR scientists with a scope to amicably disagree, collaborate, and find practical solutions together.

Accordingly, the competent authority hereby issues this 'Code of Conduct' to guide committee experts, investigators, and ICMR scientists in maintaining a fair and transparent peer-review system.

A. Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality:

1. Members are bound by the ICMR Policy on Conflict of Interest and must proactively declare any personal, professional, or financial interests that could compromise their impartiality in any way. Committee members must not participate/ refrain from participating in a meeting if they share any of the following relationships with the applicant(s):
 - i. **Personal:** A relative or member of the household (including, but not limited to, a spouse, child, sibling, or parent).
 - ii. **Professional:** A business partner, active scientific collaborator within the preceding five (5) years, or the applicant's thesis/postdoctoral mentor.

iii. **Institutional:** A current member, faculty, or employee of the exact same Department or Institution as the applicant.

2. The following must be kept strictly confidential

- Contents of all submitted project documents, archives and official correspondence/s
- Reviewers' comments and scoring
- Identities of other Committee members

3. Experts should not submit revised or significantly similar research proposals that are or have been under active evaluation by committee or to any future ICMR committees as a Principal Investigator (PI) or Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI).

4. Experts should not join, as a PI or Co-PI, in any research proposals that have been formally reviewed or considered by the committee with you as a member.

5. Experts should not alter, revise, or modify any comments or scores once the meeting is concluded and Chairperson of the meeting has finalized a decision. The evaluations from the session should be strictly confidential and final. Any subsequent correction if needed will require

formal consent from all members and explicit approval from the competent authority.

6. Any inquiries received from the scientific community regarding ICMR policies, committee practices, or application procedures must be redirected to the ICMR e-PMS portal (po.epms), as these guidelines undergo dynamic updates/ amendments. Don't entertain direct requests from applicants for explanations regarding a committee decision. All such inquiries must be formally referred to the ICMR e-PMS.

B. Meeting Decorum, mutual respect, welcoming and positive attitude

- Experts should maintain courteous and polite environment at all times
- Experts should appreciate and respect differences of scientific opinion.
- Experts must refrain from cross-commenting, targeting individuals, or making personal remarks to preserve meeting harmony especially to the proposal PI/ Team during their interview.
- Experts should offer equal, unbiased opportunity to all presenting investigators. It should be kept in mind that different regions have different needs and opinions may differ person-to-person. The aim should be to value the idea without any personal bias or assumptions.

Mandatory Undertaking: Committee members must formally acknowledge and accept the guidelines prior to reviewing applications provided to them by Program Officer (PO).

Approved by:

Director General, ICMR

Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)

Copy for information and compliance to:

1. Additional Director Generals (Extramural and Intramural)
2. Senior Deputy Director General (Administration)
3. Senior Financial Advisor
4. All Divisional Heads
5. Directors / Directors-in-Charge of all permanent ICMR Institutes and Centres.
6. IT Cell