Christy's notes from townhall meeting of CIHR funding and peer review July 20th 2016

Note: new Canadian survey for fundamental science project/model organism grants.
(Christy updated our flyer to include this).

If you didn't make the meeting, it can be viewed here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htmLCh39PUg&feature=youtu.be

CIHR summit meeting update from Jim Woodgett

Focused on F2F peer review
Foundation NOT discussed
* CIHR acted v. differently w 2 health ministers at meeting (Simon Kennedy, David Clements)
Superficial discussion about principles
Missing details of F2F review, but scientists will be involved in assignments and must have sufficient time for review.
Reviewers are accountable at face to face meetings
Remaining challenges:

same leadership
timeline very tight – when will project deadline be?
working group (led by Paul Kubes) tasked with developing new guidelines
danger CIHR may water down the changes – due to time restrictions
3 competitions (2P and 1F) need to be funded from budget envelope cf to only 2 from last budget * significant concern

PANEL & AUDIENCE DISCUSSIONS RE CIHR PROBLEMS WITH THE PRESENT FUNDING SYSTEM & SOLUTIONS

CIHR & related problems

Problem: Leadership and governance

- lack of confidence in culture and administration
– accountability at all levels missing

Solution:

Need president and VP to resign/step down
Create scientific advisory committee to interact with new senior leadership at CIHR
Need new leadership that the scientific community respect and are aligned with
Someone respected in the community, with commitment to all 4 pillars,
& with experience in leadership role

Problem: Chasm between researchers and senior Univ. admin and U15 VPs/Deans
Solution: Better communication both directions?
Twitter enabling a unified researcher voice. Can clarify our relationship w CIHR and our needs. Present some sort of memo to present our views. For eg. cancel CERC, CRC, SPOR, FDN and redirect funds into operating/project grants

Problem: CIHR not listening to feedback from scientists. Perfect storm of events w CIHR and new government and new UBC president…
Solution: By pass CIHR and develop government relationships (Ministers). Role for new UBC president?
Federal review group is listening although CIHR is only one piece of this, so we need to be active and make our voices heard.
Problem : The 2017 CIHR evaluation too late to be of use.

Budget problems

Problem: BUDGET: 3 competitions this time not 2, with same budget
Solution: More funds from government
Need to aim for 20% success rate
With more funds – there would be less complaints about reviewing if all excellent grants could be funded

Problem: too much money going into programs –eg SPORS….$125M in 5 areas. A bigger problem than the foundation
Solution: Claw back 2 or 3 years from each SPOR. Each will still have $10M or $15M from its promised award, but a distribution of remaining funds will go a long way to get CIHR and the research community back on even keel.

Problem: Don't think that more money into programs (such as SPORs, Foundation) translates into more results/outputs.

Problem: Accordion funding, destroys labs and Canadian Science
Solution: Consistent, sufficient funding. Remove politics/cycles from research funding

Problem: "Siloed" funding: separate agencies for salary (CRC), consumables (CIHR), equipment (CFI),
Solution: Needs to be integrated discussions/coordination/consolidation

Application problems:

Problems for next round: Application changes
• restricted timeline for next round of changes
• development of new application (reviewers asking for inadmissible info)
• development of "rational" scoring /ranking system – present ranking system IRRATIONAL – problems when reviewers have all strong applications or all weak or different numbers of grants
Solutions:
developments doable BUT will take time. Q whether can be achieved before next granting deadline.
• allow applicants to tell a story
• allow the inclusion of limited amount of preliminary data (2 pages of figs?)

Problem: proposed change to 10 page grant including figs and tables.
Solution: Make it 10 pages + two pages for figs, so the application is consistent to all. This way,

applicants don't have to decide between content and preliminary data , as reviewers will ask for more preliminary data or more grant details.

Problem: What does "translation" mean ? Especially for fundamental science.
Solution: Provide a full, clear definition, including one for basic science. Should be defined for each pillar in the application and instructions AND the reviewers made aware of this.

Problem: Basic/fundamental research being short-changed -> CIHR doesn't seem to support this if it isn't bench to bedside.
Solution: Communicate clear advantage and achievements of this research to the public

Problem: Application structure and reviews are inappropriate for fundamental science, particularly model organisms.
Solution: Fundamental science must be valued by CIHR and appreciated by reviewers (without having to generate a new therapeutic/clinical application within a 5 yr time frame). If this doesn't change for the next competition, these grants will be triaged again and not get the needed F2F review.
Solution: Make criteria for evaluation and instructions clear to BOTH applicants and reviewers
ie what does "AND/OR include translational significance" mean? , AND make sure reviewers know if it is AND/OR. If needed, tailor applications for each pillar.

Problem: streamlined CVs excluded key details arbitrarily
Solution: Adoption of a CV format more like NIH

Problem: application structure didn't provide necessary info for reviewers to conduct appropriate reviews
Problem: Hard to declare conflict of interest & ability to review

Problem: burnout of applicants and reviewers
Solution: increase funding so 20% of grants funded

Problem: inherent challenges/limits w differing reviewers opinions, even with F2F review

Problem: Lack of scientific based reviews in current (new) system
Solution: Return to old peer review (PRCs), then tweak from there

Reviewer problems:

Problems: Reviewing quality, structured review not working, lack of preliminary data/figures for evaluation
Solutions: Better assignment of grants with scientific input; have reviews self-assess their ability for each grant (H, M, L, No) and provide this info with the scores– to help weighting of reviewers score if outliers. Post-reviews for others reviewers to see (? not sure what was meant here)
• ensure merit based review that balances risk w quality

Problem: Reviewer feedback to applicants very limited,

Solution: Peer review should assess science and provide recommendations for improvement (as in past)

Problem: insufficient time for reviewers and limited time for virtual discussion
Solution: pilot changes first THEN apply to all population, eliminate virtual discussion – it was a disaster. Need specific expert reviews, involve scientists in reviewer selection – this is the critical point to get right.

Problem: Anonymous reviewers
Solution: F2F review meeting

Problem: different numbers of reviewers for grants
Solution: Must ensure all grants get same number of reviewers

Problem: New peer review lacked any benefits for the reviewers.
Solution: The old way was educational, increased networking

Problem: Exclusion of current applicants as reviewers

Problem: reviewer expertise lacking, lack of committee memory, no opportunity to respond to previous reviewers
Solution: Restore F2F peer review committees back and response to reviewers on applications and allow grant resubmissions

Problem: maintaining on line/virtual triage of 60%. This represents a compromise.
Solution: F2F triage if have previous Peer Review Committees.

Problem: with proposed modified larger clustered F2F panels – difficult to do F2F triage. Also if too big will run into problem of conflict of interest/recruitment of panel members.
Solution: Have enough panels so applicants can end up in 1 or 2 panels..

Suggested improvements to review process:
• Must move to numerical scoring, NO ranking by percentage
• Reintroduce SO notes and feedback that helps applicants improve grants.
• With repeat grants, scores should improve, not go down

Comment: Assure representation of all pillars on the reforming-the-reforms working group.

Problem: Foundation grants
– too much money allocated
- pilot exclusion criteria were problematic
Solution: Best grants from project considered for Merit Awards instead w possibility of longer funding term, as is done in NIH –This way also reduce competitions to one – more efficient
(NIH -merit awards https://www.nigms.nih.gov/research/pages/meritawards.aspx)
Support for recipients serving as reviewers

Problem: Removed new investigator awards, now have to Rescue ECI by providing additional funds.
Solution: Bring them back…?

Overall Solutions
1. Need to identify top priorities for change @ CIHR and focus on these – Define Short-term and Long-term goals.

2. Goal to increase $$$ for health research: need to be solution focused and stay actively engaged w Minister of Health. Collate health research stats vs rest of world, as well as emphasise training of future researchers.

Next steps
• Develop unified message with short and long term goals
• SPARC (Heads and Chairs at other Unis) collect and collate applic packages, reviewers comments, rankings to generate findings and recommendation to go to CIHR – Stephane already sent out flyer.

• unified voice for upcoming application changes
• social media + surveys + CIHR + federal government + locally via individual letters to MPs