

## TACF External Grants Policies and Protocol

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Submitted by Sara Fern Fitzsimmons, chair of External Grants Committee

### ***Committee Selection***

The chair of the External Grants Committee (EGC) will be chosen by the Chair of the Science Oversight Committee (SOC). The chair of the EGC will constitute the committee using four members of the Research Advisory Committee (RAC). Selection will take form via request by the chair to all members of the RAC. Those who agree to serve will be on the committee. In the event that the Chair is unable to retrieve a minimum of four members from the RAC, the Chair will advertise among all members of the SOC. Should the minimum membership still not be reached, TACF staff will complete the membership.

### ***Request for Proposal and Annual Timeline***

- The Request For Proposals (RFP) will be reviewed annually prior to distribution by the Chair of the EGC, the Chair of the SOC, and the TACF President, on or about March 15.
- The RFP will be sent to interested parties via email, Constant Contact, and posted to the TACF website on or about April 15.
- The deadline for proposals is on or about August 15.
- Proposals and scoresheets are distributed to members of the SOC, RAC, and TACF staff on or about September 1 with a deadline for completion on or about October 10.
- The chair will review and accumulate raw scores and comments for review by the EGC. The EGC will have minimum of 1 conference call to review proposals and scoresheets. The EGC will develop a report and proposed funding scheme for review by the SOC at TACFs Annual Meeting on or about October 20.
- The chair of the EGC will notify recipients of their awards on or about November 15 with copy to TACF's Accountant and Grants Specialist. TACFs Grants Specialist will work with the award recipients to complete a contract.

### ***Review of Proposals***

The chair of the EGC will create a scoresheet for members of the SOC, RAC, and TACF staff to use to score each proposal. Proposals are scored from 0 (worst) to 10 (best) in each of the following categories: relevance to TACF goals; appropriateness of methods and experimental design; adequacy of training and experience of personnel; quality and clarity of the proposal; and appropriateness of budget, facilities and proposed time interval to meet objectives.

- If a reviewer has submitted a proposal and has either a conflict of interest (COI) or conflict of commitment (COC), they must inform the chair of the conflict in the

“Comments” section of their scoresheet for the proposal(s) on which there is a conflict (see section below on “Conflicts of Interest and Commitment”).

- Scores from reviewers with a conflict will be reviewed and, at the discretion of the EGC chair, will be included (see section below on “Conflicts of Interest and Commitment”).
  - At a maximum, all scores, with the exception of those on which the reviewer has a COI and/or COC, will be used in the calculation of the raw score. For those proposals on which there is a conflict, an average of all other reviewer scores will be added into the calculation of the raw score for that proposal.
  - At a minimum, should the chair decide that the scores are too biased, the scores will be included with the reviewer’s comments for subsequent consideration by the EGC, but they will not be calculated in the raw score.
- Incomplete or improperly filled scores will be included in the raw score at the EGC chair’s discretion. If scores from these incorrect submissions are not used in the raw score, they are otherwise captured as comments for the EGC to review during their deliberation.
- Raw scores accumulated from the scoresheets are only one metric used for ranking and subsequent recommendation by the EGC. The EGC will also consider overall budget amount, history of success and reporting by submitters if they had received awards in the past, support of TACFs program in other ways, proclaimed match amounts, and further discussion on each project.
- Each member of the EGC will be assigned 20% of the proposals for deep review, and will therefore be the “point person” for that proposal during EGC deliberation.

### ***Conflicts of Interest and Commitment***

Members of both the SOC and RAC are chosen because of the work they do and/or have done in research on the American chestnut. As such, these members are often those who submit proposals to the EGC, and these members often have business relationships, both past and present.

There are two specific conflicts of interest (COI) on which this policy gives specific response.

- 1) Reviewers from the SOC, RAC and/or TACF Staff are part of the research team submitting a proposal. Since all members of the SOC, RAC and TACF Staff are asked to submit review of all proposals, this is the most common COI for the EGC.
- 2) Members of the EGC have submitted a proposal: Because members of the SOC and, especially the RAC, have been chosen because of their research on the American chestnut, it is likely that a member of the EGC will choose to submit a proposal for research to the EGC.
  - In the event that a member of the EGC would like to submit a proposal, that member will need to inform the EGC chair prior to submission.

- With help from the EGC chair, that member must recruit a replacement to serve on the EGC for the deliberation for that round using the selection criteria defined above (Committee Selection). In the unlikely event that a replacement cannot be found, the proposal will not be reviewed for funding. The original member may choose to return for the next year or, upon mutual agreement and approval of the EGC Chair, allow the replacement to continue to serve on the EGC.

Other COI and COC will undoubtedly arise. Our committee relies on the reviewers and EGC members to self-identify the conflict. Most major research institutions have compiled inclusive lists and definitions of COI and COC<sup>1</sup>. TACF encourages submitters and reviewers to review the policies of their institution for more information.

Any new conflict which does not match the two cases specified above will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by EGC Chair and members of the RAC. Once the case is evaluated and a course-of-action has been identified, it will be subsequently included in this policy as deemed necessary by the SOC and EGC Chair.

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<sup>1</sup> This link from Columbia University covers the background and issues concerning COI in depth:

[http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/rcr/rcr\\_conflicts/introduction/index.html](http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/rcr/rcr_conflicts/introduction/index.html)

This link from the National Science Foundation lists the most egregious examples of COI for their grants program:

[http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/gpg/nsf04\\_23/appb.jsp](http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/gpg/nsf04_23/appb.jsp)

The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences has a policy of “managing” COI:

<http://www.pnas.org/site/authors/coi.xhtml>