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Dear Colleagues,

The CAP NSERC Liaison Committee has, at the request of a CAP member, looked into the NSERC Discovery Grant (DG) program external review process, specifically the response rate for external reviewer reports received for grant applications.

Unfortunately, in each competition year, there are a number of DG applications that receive no external reviewer reports. For the 2015 DG competition year, only 40% of the scientists who had agreed to review applications submitted external reports in advance of the deadline. For the Physics 1505 Evaluation Group, the response rate in 2015 was even worse at 30%. NSERC has acknowledged that there has been a decrease in the response rate recently, but 2015 was unusually low for Physics 1505.

External peer-review is a critical step in the NSERC DG adjudication process as the input from experts in the field is valuable. Further, the constructive advice received by applicants can lead to improvements in the quality of the research or in the quality of the proposal in the case of an unsuccessful grant.

To help address this, the Physics team at NSERC has taken the following steps:

- 1) Evaluation Group members are being asked to suggest 7 reviewers instead of 5;
- 2) staff are spending more time contacting and following up with potential reviewers;
- 3) the forms for external reviewers have been revised for greater ease of completion.

Given the shockingly low response rate in 2015, the CAP NSERC Liaison Committee is reaching out to the CAP community to encourage more active future participation in DG review requests. We all need to do our part, especially if you are a current DG holder.

For those who have already agreed to review an application(s) this year, thank you for agreeing to do so, and please ensure to submit the report(s) by the deadline, January 8, 2016. This service to your peers not only has a positive impact on the quality of the research supported but also helps to better direct investments in discovery research to the benefit of all Canadians.

The CAP NSERC Liaison Committee will be monitoring the response rate this year to see whether the low participation trend continues and, if so, this will be reviewed with NSERC. In this regard, we welcome any suggestions you have on how to improve the external reviewer response rate for the Discovery Grant program.

Regards,

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