

PEER REVIEW AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY

Introduction

Encephalitis International recognises the importance of peer review in the assessment, publication and dissemination of research. This document therefore provides a code of conduct for peer reviewers, and for those who submit work for peer review.

Peer Review Process

All applications for funding go through a strict peer review process, which means:

- Reviewed by members of Encephalitis International's Research Subcommittee and,
- Assessment by reviewers with appropriate experience and expertise external to Encephalitis International if the Research Subcommittee members are conflicted or do not have the appropriate expertise, or the applications are for grants of more than £25,000.

Peer review criteria:

- Scientific validity, significance and originality.
- Feasibility and value for money.
- Relevance to Encephalitis International's charitable objectives and its research priorities.
- Context with other relevant research currently ongoing, or completed.
- Supports the principle of the 3Rs to refine, reduce and replace the use of animals in research if applicable.
- Done by researchers with relevant skills and facilities.

Based on the score given to each application, the Chair of the Research Subcommittee makes recommendation to the Chief Executive regarding funding decisions. Details of applications, and related correspondence are strictly confidential and should not be discussed with persons outside the review process. Applicants should not directly approach members of the Research Subcommittee in connection with their research applications. The reviewers should not provide any advice to applicants in relation to their application. The decisions and comments of the internal and external reviewers are treated in confidence by Encephalitis International's Staff.

Feedback to unsuccessful applicants may be provided on request or may sometimes be given unsolicited if the Subcommittee considers that this will be particularly beneficial to the applicants in improving their proposal for resubmission elsewhere. This feedback will normally be conveyed in writing by Encephalitis International Staff in the form of comments made by the Subcommittee, or anonymized comments from referees' reports where a referee has indicated that such unattributed feedback may be given.

Encephalitis International is grateful to the members of the Research Subcommittee and external peer reviewers who generously donate their time and expertise in supporting our cause.

Peer Review Principles

1. Accountability:

- Encephalitis International's Research Strategy, The Research Subcommittee's Terms of Reference and the Peer Review and Conflict of Interest Policy are available on Encephalitis International's website.
- The review process and criteria for assessing a specific proposal are published before applicants submit proposals.
- The names of all members of the Research Subcommittee are found on Encephalitis International's website.
- Encephalitis International, the reviewers and researchers acknowledge that they are ultimately accountable to the general public and should act accordingly. They should ensure the dignity,

rights, safety and wellbeing of all involved in research and avoid unreasonable risk or harm to research subjects, patients, participants, researchers and others.

2. Integrity:

- Confidentiality: Everyone involved in assessing the research is bound by confidentiality which means no disclosing, retaining or copying any information related to the research.
- Data Protection: All reviewers involved in assessing the research need to comply with Encephalitis International's Data Protection Policy.
- Intellectual Property: All reviewers must respect intellectual property and should not disclose or use as their own, any preliminary data or new ideas contained within research documents which are being reviewed.
- Misconduct or ethical concerns: If a reviewer becomes aware of possible misconduct, such as plagiarism, fabrication or falsification, or have ethical concerns about the design or conduct of the research they need to inform in confidence the person who requested the review.
- Disclosure of Conflict of Interests: Reviewers should identify and declare in advance of the review, any conflicting interests that could impinge on the effectiveness or objectivity of the review process. This could include, but is not limited to, any institutional, legal, ethical, financial, moral, or personal conflict of interest. Please refer to the Conflict of Interest section below.

3. Professionalism

- Every effort should be made to complete the review within the specific period and reviewers should notify Encephalitis International in cases where this is not possible.
- Encephalitis International, the reviewers and researchers should promote the open exchange of ideas, research methods, data and results and their discussion, scrutiny and debate, subject to any considerations of confidentiality.

4. Objectivity and impartiality

- Objectivity and impartiality should be followed throughout the review process.
- Reviewers and researchers need to be accurate and honest.
- Encephalitis International will support the reviewers and not pressure them to breach their obligations.
- If reviewers feel they don't have adequate competence they should refuse to review.

5. Balance

- The reviewers reflect professionals with different areas of expertise and experience.
- They decide regarding the scientific quality of the applicants in a balanced way providing constructive feedback and making recommendations of how the proposal should be improved. No personal attacks or criticism are acceptable.

6. Independent decision making:

- The reviewers are invited to be part of the Research Subcommittee from the Scientific Advisory Panel members.
- They are independent from Encephalitis International's administrative staff and trustees. Encephalitis International's Chief Executive makes funding decisions based on the Research Subcommittee's recommendations.
- The reviewers adhere to Encephalitis International's guidance regarding the peer review process.
- There is a Conflict of Interest procedure and potential beneficiaries are not involved in the review process.

Conflict of Interest

It is fundamental to identify, document and deal with potential conflict of interests during the review process, therefore all internal and external reviewers are asked to declare whether they have a conflict of interest in regards to the applications they have been asked to review.

- Where the reviewer is an applicant or co-applicant on a grant application, he or she must declare an interest and withdraw from any consideration of that application. That member will not receive documents pertaining to the application, learn the identity of its referees or receive its referees' reports.
- Reviewers who could be seen as a direct competitor of the applicant (e.g. they are funded or applying for funding on a similar project to the proposal under discussion) or have collaborated or published with the proposal applicant within the past three years, or work in the same institution, should declare an interest.
- In cases where an individual is uncertain as to whether a conflict of interest exists or not, they should report this to the Chair, who will decide on a course of action.
- If an individual is concerned about a possible conflict of interest involving another member of a Panel, then he or she should raise the matter with the Chair.
- Where the Chair of the Research Committee is an applicant or co-applicant on a grant application, he or she must declare an interest and should not be involved in that round of meetings. The chair of the Scientific Advisory Panel will be involved in managing any potential conflicts of interest of the Chair of the Research Subcommittee.
- Encephalitis International recognises that the majority of conflicts or potential conflicts will relate to a particular issue and as such will not present any long-term restrictions on an individual's ability to work for Encephalitis International or to sit on its Subcommittee or Panel. In a small number of cases, major conflicts of interest may arise which compromise an individual's ability to continue in their position within Encephalitis International. Where such a situation relates to a member of the Subcommittee, the matter will be discussed by the Panel as a whole, whose recommendation should be taken into consideration by Encephalitis International's Chief Executive who makes the final decision.

Approval

This document was approved by the Chief Executive in January 2025

Before approving ensure version number is V4 or above.

Document Change Control

Version	Date	Review Date	Changes by	Summary of changes
V1	January 2019		A.Ellerington	New Document
V2	14 th Aug 2019		P.Chapman	Updated Branding
V3	11 August 2021	Aug 2022	A Ellerington	Reviewed and formatted
V4	January 2025	January 2027	E Collins A Ellerington	Reviewed and Branding