



## **GUIDELINES FOR STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS\***

Revised January 1998

### **Background**

The Maritime Centre of Excellence for Women's Health (MCEWH) is a grant funded program of Dalhousie University supported by Health Canada. The Centre's institutional home is provided through an inkind contribution provided by the IWK Grace Health Centre for Children, Women and Families. The Centre has core funding for five program years with additional funding for a start up and closure period.

The Centre, through designated representatives, is accountable to Dalhousie University, which in turn, is legally and financially accountable to the Government of Canada. The Centre has a Steering Committee which serves in a capacity similar to a board of trustees, but without legal liability. The Steering Committee has representation from academia, the women's community, women's health movement, public policy officials and women's health clinicians. The effectiveness of the Steering Committee members in discharging their fiduciary/financial responsibilities, and in setting and overseeing Centre policies, is essential to the continued success of the MCEWH.

In the interim start up period, the Centre benefitted from the dedicated service of many individuals who brought rich experience and dedication to their task. Through the Transition Planning Committee process from July to September, 1997, the governance structure of the Centre was fine tuned and a Steering Committee of 12 representatives replaced the original body of 28 interim Steering Committee members.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this set of reference guidelines on the role and operation of the Steering Committee is to assist new and old members to take into account the principles and practice of institutional governance within the context of the MCEWH.

\*based on the Board of Trustees guidelines of the CGIAR, The World Bank

## **Job Description for Steering Committee Chairs and Members**

### **The Committee Co-Chairs** (2 year renewable appointments)

- set the tone for Steering Committee and subcommittee work, ensure that members have the information and time they need to do their jobs, and oversee the logistics of the committees operation.
- report to the full Steering Committee on committee decisions, policy recommendations, and other committee business. They work closely with the Executive Director.
- assign work to Steering Committee members, set meeting agendas and run the meetings, and ensure distribution of minutes and reports to members.
- evaluate periodically the Steering Committee's accomplishments in relation to the work plan and identify areas of the committee's work that needs improvement.
- set guidelines for the membership of the Steering Committee and oversee the process of recruitment of new members; ensure that decision making, policy setting and project approval is done in a transparent, effective and time efficient manner.
- ensure that conflict of interest guidelines are followed and respected
- the academic co-chair serves as one of the designated signing authorities on behalf of Dalhousie University
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### **Steering Committee Members** (two year renewable appointments)

- commit to participate actively and to attend a minimum of 6 meetings per year, including substantive participation in committee meetings and discussions. Members who can participate fully in the work of the Steering Committee may be requested by the Co-Chairs to step down.
- volunteer for and willingly accept assignments and complete them thoroughly and on time.

- stay informed about women's health, about committee matters, prepare well for meetings, and review and comment on minutes and reports.
- build collegial working relationships with other committee members and research affiliates of the Centre and contribute to consensus and a positive Centre "culture".
- participate actively in the Centre's annual, mid point and final program review and evaluation; ensure that the Centre's program of research informs and impacts on national policy; support the five mandates of the Centre: knowledge generation, networking, communications, information dissemination, policy impact.
- treat all Steering Committee documentation and proposals in a confidential manner until they are officially released as Centre documents and policy.
- represent the Centre as an "ambassador", ensure that policy issues and concerns of the broader membership are brought forward for discussion and resolution, promote and cultivate prospective members' interest in the Centre.
- propose criteria and help to identify potential Steering Committee and Advisory Committee members.
- support and mentor new researchers; encourage graduate students and other community and academic researchers to participate in the life and work of the Centre
- identify research funding opportunities which will enable the Centre to secure financial sustainability.
- review the Centre's work plan and financial reports which define the MCEWH's purpose, objectives, responsibilities and reporting relationships
- review the results of audits and make recommendations for improvements to the internal control structure.
- request special studies or research investigations
- monitor the organizational framework of the Centre, the function of the Working Groups, including the appointment or removal of staff.

- approve annual and multiyear financial expenditures over \$5000 including research projects, administration costs, salary reviews, etc.

### **Ad Hoc Committees**

Ad Hoc committees are created to meet special needs of the Steering Committee or Centre and are retired when their work is complete. The Transition Planning Committee of 1997 is one such example. From time to time the Centre will require an ad hoc search committee for new staff.

Ad hoc committees require clear statements of purpose, well-defined lines of authority, a determination concerning staff membership or involvement, and a timetable for completing their work.

To enable as broad a range of researchers as possible to participate in the work of the MCEWH (and so as not create financial hardship for any individuals who are not gainfully employed) the Centre may reimburse Ad Hoc Committee members for direct child care, transportation, parking, long distance costs, meals and incidental costs for Working Group members. According to the Centre's Reimbursement Policy, reimbursement will be based on reasonable and actual costs, and receipts will be requested as required.

### **Confidentiality**

Throughout the work of the Steering Committee, the issue of confidentiality is very important. In approving or rejecting projects for funding, appointing new committee members or recruiting staff, a great deal of discretion is required in terms of the way questions are asked and information gathered and disseminated. All Steering Committee members are responsible for ensuring that sensitive matters and documents are treated confidentially until approved and released.

## **Conflict of Interest**

Steering Committee members are expected to declare conflict of interest or potential i.e. “perceived” conflict of interest. This is particularly important when members of the Steering Committee are requested to approve projects for funding, or to act as chair/co-chair for select committees e.g. Recruitment Committees, Peer Review Committee etc.

Steering Committee members are requested to absent themselves during the period where projects are brought forward for approval in which they have a direct or indirect vested interest. Members of the Steering Committee may serve as research investigators on Centre funded projects but not benefit financially.

Members of the Steering Committee may participate in externally funded research projects which are administered through the Centre. In such cases they should declare the details of any honoraria to be received.

## **Representation**

Steering Committee members come from a variety of backgrounds and organizations. By and large members are invited based on their contribution to the women’s health movement and field of research. They need to know the strengths and weaknesses of the Centre and how they can contribute and work effectively for its benefit. The Steering Committee may choose to hold a special orientation session, retreat, or meeting for new members.

The filling of staff and committee vacancies should be planned so that the Steering Committee will always have among its members sufficient number who are recognized by virtue of their successful performance in the women’s health movement, research, and/or practice.

Every Steering Committee member should serve on one committee or Working Group, and committees should be well organized and as productive as possible.

Steering Committee members are invited based on the following personal characteristics:

- ability to listen, analyze, think clearly and creatively, exercise discretion and work well with people both individually and within a group
- willingness to prepare for and attend Steering Committee and other meetings; to ask questions, take responsibility, and follow through on a given assignment; contribute to the

resource development of the MCEWH, identify research and funding opportunities

- interest in building upon or developing certain skills e.g. cultivating and soliciting funding, *grantsmanship* recruiting and supporting Steering Committee members, reading and understanding financial statements, learning more about the substantive research and policy aspects of the Centre.
- potential to contribute to the MCEWH and the Centres of Excellence for Women's Health Program mandate and objectives - to both inform and improve policy uptake on gender sensitive research across Canada.
- possess honesty, sensitivity to and tolerance of differing views; a friendly, responsive, and patient approach, community-building skills, personal integrity, a developed sense of values, concern for the women's health movement and the Centre's development, and a sense of humour!