

For Discussion at the April 2, 2003 Steering Committee Meeting

Draft Terms of Reference for the ACEWH Steering Committee*

Duties and Responsibilities

The Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health (ACEWH) Steering Committee is a voluntary advisory as opposed to a governance body. The main function of a Steering Committee member is to provide leadership, support and guidance to the Centre and Executive Director. Steering Committee members are invited to provide input and advice with respect to long range strategic planning of the Centre and to serve in an ambassadorial role to promote policy based research in women's health in Canada and internationally.

The Steering Committee members are invited to serve on a term basis, usually for an initial 3 year term. Appointments may be renewed for additional terms.

Steering Committee members will undertake to:

- participate in a minimum of 4 teleconference Steering Committee meetings per year
- participate in at least one in person Steering Committee each year
- serve on ad hoc committees or working groups as needed
- help identify nominees for the Steering Committee, establish subcommittees, task groups as needed
- contribute to the strategic policy level planning of the Centre with special attention to long range sustainability planning and evaluation
- review reports and provide policy advisory support and input to the Centre's future directions and multiyear workplans
- identify relevant policy audiences, emerging issues and opportunities for provision of policy advice to government, community leaders, and other stakeholders in women's health.
- work to ensure the financial sustainability of the Centre beyond the multi year funding mandate provided by Health Canada
- serve as an ambassador-at-large of the Centre
- assist with networking and building of collaborative teams of community, academic, clinical and public policy researchers
- represent the Centre at conferences, fora, meetings in Canada and abroad

Membership

The Steering Committee membership will include up to 13 voting representatives (in addition to the Executive Director who is ex-officio). Individuals with experience in policy development, women's health research, corporate/NGO fund raising, and community leadership will be nominated and

selected. The members of the Steering Committee will act as individuals and not as delegates or representatives of their particular organizations. These individuals will be appointed based on expertise, knowledge, and commitment. Members will have extensive contacts and networks in the women's health research, policy and clinical communities. The Centre is committed to encouraging women from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds to serve on the Steering Committee.

Term of Office

Steering Committee members may be appointed for a renewable three year term.

Attendance

It is expected that all members will endeavor to attend all meetings and teleconferences. If and when a scheduling conflict arises, committee members are kindly requested to advise ACEWH in advance. Those members who miss two more meetings without prior notice may be requested to reassess their membership on the Steering Committee. As founding partners of ACEWH, Dalhousie University and the IWK Health Centre are invited to identify an institutional representative to serve on the Steering Committee. Members may be nominated by the Steering Committee and are formerly invited by the Executive Director to serve on the Steering Committee.

Quorum

Not less than one half of the members shall constitute a quorum.

Notice of Meetings

The Steering Committee will meet at least four times a year, either by teleconference or in person meetings. The Co-Chairs will give notice of a meeting not less than 7 days in advance of a meeting.

Decisions

Decisions of the Steering Committee will be confirmed by a simple majority.

** First Revised Draft December 9, 1998, Second Revised draft March 4, 2003*

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GUIDELINES FOR STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Background

The Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health (ACEWH) is a grant funded partnership program of Dalhousie University and the IWK Health Centre supported by Health Canada. The Centre's institutional home is provided through a generous in kind contribution provided by the IWK Health Centre.

The Centre, through designated representatives, is accountable to Dalhousie University, which in turn, is legally and financially accountable to the Government of Canada and other donors. The Centre has an advisory Steering Committee which serves in a capacity similar to an advisory 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.

In the interim start up period of 1996-97, 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 13 representatives replaced the original body of 28 interim Steering Committee members. The role of the Steering Committee also evolved from a governance body (an entity which incurs legal liability) to that of an advisory body - i.e. advisory group which provides advice and guidance to the Centre staff but does not incur legal liability.

The Executive Director holds a faculty position in the Faculty of Health Professions and reports to the Dean, Faculty of Health Professions, on administrative matters pertaining to the University's governance policy. As a grant funded research centre, ACEWH financial and personnel policies comply with the central policies of Dalhousie University. As the Centre is funded by Health Canada, the Centre complies with the official Treasury Board Travel Policy of the Government of Canada. The Executive Director reports and collaborates on policy matters to the Steering Committee members and ensures that members are provided with timely information and updates pertaining to the Centre's strategic plan implementation, fund raising and project portfolio. As a membership based organization, the Steering Committee and staff of the ACEWH share a commitment to advance policy based research in order to promote social change, social justice and equity in women's and girls' health and well being.

Purpose

The purpose of this set of reference guidelines on the role and operation of the Steering Committee is to assist new and "seasoned" members to take into account the principles and practice of their advisory role within the context of ACEWH.

Description for Steering Committee Chairs and Members

Committee Co-Chairs (3 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 and collaborate closely with the Executive Director to ensure high quality input on future directions and strategic planning.
- assign ‘task’ work to Steering Committee members, set meeting agendas and run the meetings, and ensure distribution of minutes and reports to members.
- review and assess periodically the Steering Committee’s accomplishments in relation to the work plan and identify areas for future strategic directions.
- set guidelines for the membership of the Steering Committee and recommend recruitment of new members to the Executive Director.

Steering Committee Members (3 year renewable appointments)

- commit to participate actively and to attend a minimum of 4 meetings per year, including substantive participation in committee meetings and discussions.
- volunteer for and accept “special” tasks and assignments
- share information and ‘intelligence’ on women’s health, gender and health, men’s health, prepare well for meetings, provide input, 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 and progressive 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 various policy and program mandates of the Centre: e.g. knowledge generation, knowledge translation, 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 members.
- support and mentor new researchers; encourage students and other community, public policy, clinical and academic researchers to participate in the life and work of the Centre
- identify research funding and endowment opportunities to enable the Centre to secure financial sustainability over the long term
- provide support to the Executive Director and Staff by reviewing the Centre’s strategic work plan and financial reports which define the ACEWH’s purpose, objectives, responsibilities and reporting relationships
- review the results of audits and make recommendations for improvements to the internal control structure, participate in internal and external audits and reviews as necessary.
- request special studies or research investigations

Ad Hoc Committees and Working Groups

Ad Hoc committees and Working Groups 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. The Centre also participates on a number of national working and coordination groups, some of whom require “person-power” contributions from the Centre. Steering Committee members may be invited to serve on national Centre of Excellence for Women’s Health and other ad hoc committees and working groups on an as needed basis.

Ad hoc committees require clear statements of purpose, well-defined lines of authority, a determination concerning steering committee 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 ACEWH (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 advising on projects for funding, appointing new committee members or serving on staff recruitment committees, 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 invited to serve on project proposals, to review projects for funding, or to act as chair/co-chair for committees (e.g. Peer Review Committee).

Steering Committee members are requested to absent themselves during the period where projects are brought forward for discussion 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.

Steering Committee members may be invited to chair and host special events (e.g., the Annual Women's Health Policy Forum and Leadership Awards).

Representation

Steering Committee members come from a variety of backgrounds and organizations. By and large members are invited based on their knowledge and contribution to the women's health, gender and

health, and men's health fields of research. They need to know the strengths and weaknesses of the Centre and how they can best provide advice and counsel, contribute and work effectively for its benefit. The Steering Committee may request to hold a special orientation session, retreat, or orientation meeting for new members.

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

- strong policy orientation, knowledge of policy decision making processes, strategic planning, fund raising, and various advisory board models and experience.
- ability to listen, analyze, think clearly and creatively, exercise discretion and work well with diverse groups of 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 ACEWH, identify research and funding opportunities
- interest in building upon or developing certain skills e.g. cultivating and soliciting funding, *grantmanship* 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 ACEWH 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 community based research, social justice health movements.