Grant Review Protocol

Approved by Science Advisory Board and the Board of Directors

The Mesothelioma Applied Research Foundation's (Meso Foundation) peer reviewed grant policy is intended to ensure that grant applications submitted to the Meso Foundation are evaluated based on a process that is fair, equitable, timely, and free of bias. The peer review process is carried out by physicians and researchers on the Foundation's Science Advisory Board (SAB), who work within the mesothelioma field around the world. Community reviewers, representing mesothelioma patients and families, provide valuable feedback on grant applications, though their input is not part of the formal scoring. The entire process is overseen by the SAB chair.

Grant Review Protocol:

I. Conflicts of Interest:

A grant reviewer is considered to have a conflict of interest with an application if he/she:

- is from the same immediate department, institution, organization or company as the applicant, **and** who interacts with the applicant in the course of his/her duties at the department, institution, organization or company;
- has collaborated, been a co-applicant or published with the applicant within the last five years on the specific topic relevant to the grant application (exception will be made for Meso funded networks designed to increase partnerships among disciplines, institutions and thematic research);
- has been a student or supervisor of the applicant within the last five years;
- is a close friend or relative of the applicant;
- is in a position to gain or lose financially from the outcome of the application (e.g., holds stock in the company of an industry partner or a competitor); or
- for some other reason feels that he/she cannot provide an objective review of the application.

All grant reviewers are subject to the same conflict of interest guidelines and have signed conflict of interest disclosure forms. Staff and the SAB Chair are responsible for resolving areas of uncertainty.

Each grant reviewer will be asked to reaffirm they have no conflicts of interest to disclose before the grant review process begins.

II. Review Definitions, Guidelines and Criteria:

In reviewing each application, the reviewers will look at each application and give a score in the following areas:

Significance. Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field? If the aims of the project are achieved, how will scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice be improved? How will successful completion of the aims change the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field?

Investigator(s). Are the PD/PIs, collaborators, and other researchers well suited to the project? If Early-Stage Investigators or New Investigators, or in the early stages of independent careers, do they have appropriate experience and training? If established, have they demonstrated an ongoing record of accomplishments that have advanced their field(s)? If the project is collaborative or multi-PD/PI, do the investigators have complementary and integrated expertise; are their leadership approach, governance and organizational structure appropriate for the project?

Innovation. Does the application challenge and seek to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms by utilizing novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions? Are the concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions novel to one field of research or novel in a broad sense? Is a refinement, improvement, or new application of theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions proposed?

Approach. Are the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project? Are potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success presented? If the project is in the early stages of development, will the strategy establish feasibility, and will particularly risky aspects be managed? If the project involves clinical research, are the plans for 1) protection of human subjects from research risks, and 2) inclusion of minorities and members of both sexes/genders, justified in terms of the scientific goals and research strategy proposed?

Environment. Will the scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success? Are the institutional support, equipment and other physical resources available to the investigators adequate for the project proposed? Will the project benefit from unique features of the scientific environment, subject populations, or collaborative arrangements?

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Scoring will be done on a scale of 1 to 9, 1 being the highest score and 9 being the lowest. The following chart is given as guidance to the reviewers to determine individual review criterion, overall impact/priority scores and uniformly define weaknesses of the application.

Impact	Score	Descriptor	Additional Guidance on Strengths and Weaknesses
High	1	Exceptional	Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
High	2	Outstanding	Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
High	3	Excellent	Very strong with only some minor weaknesses
Medium	4	Very Good	Strong but with numerous minor weaknesses
Medium	5	Good	Strong but with at least one moderate weakness
Medium	6	Satisfactory	Some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses
Low	7	Fair	Some strengths but with at least one major weakness
Low	8	Marginal	A few strengths and a few major weaknesses
Low	9	Poor	Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses
Minor Weakness: An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen impact **Moderate Weakness:** A weakness that lessens impact **Major Weakness:** A weakness that severely limits impact			

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III. Review Process

The grant review process includes community reviewers representing mesothelioma patients and their families. They provide valuable perspectives and qualitative feedback on the applications; however, their evaluations will not contribute to the formal scoring. All quantitative scoring will remain the responsibility of scientific reviewers in accordance with peer-review standards

- Letters of Intent (LOIs) – Applicants begin the process by submitting an LOI in the online grant system, Foundant, describing their proposed research project. The SAB chair will assign three scientific reviewers to each LOI submission. The reviewers score each LOI, comment on the overall impact the project could have, and offer critique remarks. The LOI scores and evaluations are reviewed by the SAB chair. The top 10-15 scored LOI's are then invited to submit full applications.

- Full Applications - The SAB chair will assign three scientific reviewers and one community reviewer to each application. The reviewers are asked to complete all assigned reviews via the online grant system, Foundant. To submit a review each question must be scored and commented upon. Reviewers are asked to write thoughtful and helpful critiques as these comments are made available to applicants in hopes they will be able to improve their grant applications for future consideration.

  Comments and scores are compiled and each application is made available to the SAB Chair should any discrepancies arise. In such cases the SAB Chair and Director of Patient Services will convene to discuss found discrepancies. Once all anomalies are resolved, the scores of the scientific reviewers are ranked numerically.

IV. Reviewers' conference call

The SAB Chair will convene all reviewers on a conference call where the highest scoring grants deemed appropriate for possible funding will be discussed in greater detail. The primary reviewers will be responsible for giving a brief overview of the grants they were assigned. At the end of this discussion the applications will be ranked in order of best score. The finalists are then confirmed by the SAB Chair and then presented to the Meso Foundation's Board of Directors for final approval. Based upon the funding available, grants will then be awarded.

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V. Payments
Grants are funded for up to a total of $250,000. Payments are made over two years (50% of the total award each year), from July 1 – June 30. The first payment is generated upon signed agreement and subsequent payments are generated once required progress/financial reports, as outlined in each agreement, are submitted. These documents are reviewed by the SAB Chair before payment is authorized.

VI. Grant Termination
If a grant recipient violates the terms of the agreement, the Meso Foundation has the right to terminate the grant.

If the research by the investigator does not follow the specific aims in the grant proposal, the investigator will be contacted by letter to notify them of steps that need to be taken to resolve the issue. If the investigator fails to follow up on the steps outlined, the grant will be terminated, and the remaining funds will be returned to the Meso Foundation.

If a recipient refuses to submit the required reports outlined in the agreement, the Meso Foundation may withhold payments and could ultimately terminate the award.