Guiding Principles for the Peer Reviewer

Peer reviewers ideally will have been successful in securing external research funding.

However this is also an opportunity for less experienced researchers to develop an understanding of how funding proposals are developed and learn more about funding schemes.

The following good practice should be applied to all reviews:

Objectivity, impartiality & integrity: this should be maintained throughout the review process, regardless of the personal or professional bias of the reviewer.

Competence: reviewers have a responsibility to inform the Research Facilitation Manager where they consider themselves to be insufficiently expert in the area for review. If necessary, reviewers should decline the review and return the material unread.

Constructive critique: while reviewers are required to critically evaluate proposals, they should aim to do so in a balanced way wherever possible, identifying strengths and phrasing criticisms in a constructive way. Personal attacks or criticisms are unacceptable. The review should provide guidance on how the proposal might be improved.

Feedback: the key aim of the peer review system is to provide feedback to the researcher/applicant on ways to improve the quality of his/her research funding application. Feedback can be provided on the actual proposal using track changes and comments, i.e., research aims, case for need and background, design, budget, evaluation methods, outcomes and outputs. Feedback can also be provided on coherency of the narrative, language, and grammar and formatting.

Timeliness and responsiveness: every effort should be made to complete the review within the specific period and reviewers should notify the Research Facilitation and Development Manager in cases where this is not possible.

Disclosure of Conflict of interests: reviewers should identify and declare in advance of the review any conflicting interests that could impact 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. Where applicable, reviews should be declined.

Confidentiality: reviewers should maintain confidentiality and protect the ideas and plans of applicants by not disclosing, retaining or copying any information and by not discussing any aspect of the review process with authors/applicants or colleagues.

Reviewers must not take advantage of any information obtained as a result of their role and must adhere to both the confidentiality policies of the relevant body and the confidentiality statement of the University.

Data protection: reviewers must store and dispose of documents in compliance with the relevant Victoria University data protection policies and procedures (See the Research Data Management web page for policies, procedures and guidelines). Documents must be stored securely and not shared. Copies of the applications are to be made only for the purpose of review and all documents and copies either returned or destroyed after the review period, in accordance with the relevant procedures and guidelines where applicable.
Intellectual Property: reviewers must respect intellectual property and should not disclose to third parties, cite, or use as their own, any concepts, preliminary data, or new ideas contained within research documents which are being reviewed.

Misconduct: the College Research Director should be informed in situations where reviewers become aware of practice which falls below good conduct.

Ethics: reviewers should apply good ethical practice and comply with the University Research Integrity Policy and Procedures when assessing research applications and in considering the ethical implications of the research they are reviewing. Reviewers should encourage compliance with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

Adapted from http://www.shu.ac.uk/_assets/pdf/Principles-of-Good-Research-Practice-for-Peer-Reviewers.pdf