

SMCC Policy on Selection of Experts

The SMCC's role is to make the results of evidence-based research available to everyone via the media. Being evidence-based is paramount. The SMCC's activities inform and sometimes trigger debate, but are not intended to endorse particular policies or boost the profile of specific individuals or organizations.

The SMCC has a clear policy on who it approaches for scientific and related expertise.

Peer Review

The peer-review process of leading scientific and health journals ensures that the quality of the investigation is such that it is worthy of consideration by the wider community. This process provides a standard accepted by the scientific community by which the reliability of both investigations and researchers are judged.

The SMCC will use peer-reviewed publication in the relevant area of science and health as a basis for defining the expertise of scientists.

Expertise outside of peer-review

Some scientific research may be newsworthy while it is being performed. Similarly, in some disciplines, particularly within the social sciences, arts and humanities (e.g. science communication), publication in peer-reviewed journals is less applicable.

In such cases, the SMCC will consider:

- the professional qualifications and previous track record of the expert;
- the expert's current role as an active practitioner in his or her field;
- the expert's professional reputation within his or her field (judged by, for example, the number of significant awards and grants won); and
- the reputation of an institute, academic department or other affiliation of the expert.

Other experts in the relevant field may also be consulted. Breaking news and media deadlines could sometimes interfere with this step.

The SMCC proposes *at least one of* the following criteria for *ad hoc* academic approval of an expert in the event of **breaking news**;

- The scientist has received a grant from a recognized major international, national or provincial funding agency (such as one of CIHR, NSERC, or SSHRC).
- The scientist has a reasonable number (for their work) of peer-reviewed articles in reputable journals.
- The scientist is vouched for by another vetted scientist in their area.

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-The scientist is vouched for by a member of the Editorial Advisory Panel or other journalist of equal reputation.

Process

1. **Identification** – A potential expert is identified through recommendation from PIOS, journalists, or colleagues; through media appearances; through RAP panel members; through reputation, etc.
2. **Cataloguing** – The expert is noted in a list external to the Experts Database, along with basic affiliates and contact information
3. **RAP Clearance** - names sent to RAP, preferably in groups of between 5 and 20 experts in a RAPPER's field, for assessment of the proposed expert's scientific credibility.
4. **SMCC Interview** - SMCC member speaks to the researcher, explains the goals of the Centre and vets their research areas and ability to communicate clearly. Their accessibility will also be determined, since the availability of experts within the media's time frame may be a major determinant of which experts are put forward by the SMCC.
5. **Acceptance** - The expert is entered into the database.

The SMCC recognizes that each and every researcher recommended to them may not be known to the RAP at a level that would allow educated vetting of suitability. If a RAP member cannot pass judgment on a candidate, then the SMCC will take the following steps to establish their academic credibility:

1. **Publishing Record:** As with examination under deadline, the researcher's peer reviewed publishing record will be examined via their webpage, PubMed, or other appropriate database. Considered criteria are the number of papers, the prestige of the journals, and number of references. If the researcher has not published a paper in the last twelve months, they may be excluded. Exceptions may be made for retired researchers with proven expertise.
2. **Funding Record:** Relevant published materials will be examined for funders, declarations of interest, and other affiliations. Recognizing the nature of funding for areas such as medical research, any conflicts of interest related to funding will not necessarily preclude an expert's exclusion from the database. However, *any and all declarations of such interest in relevant publications will be communicated by the SMCC to any journalist to whom the expert is suggested.*
3. **Media Record:** The candidate will be searched in media databases (Google News, Factiva) for previous media appearances. Red flags would include: misrepresentation of data and results, representing speculation as fact, or being implicated in scientific fraud.

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Suitability

If the expertise of an individual is subsequently questioned, the SMCC will refer final decisions on the credibility and suitability of that expert to the appropriate member of the Research Advisory Panel and/or any experts they think are best suited.

Declaring interests

Known affiliations or interests of scientists will be clearly stated where possible. When a particular study is in the news, SMCC staff will examine the conflict of interest clause of any publications and any available funding information for potential issues with its authors.

Review

This policy will be reviewed and updated from time to time.