4. Committees and Peer Reviewers

The Association in its early years, used various (long serving) Committees (eg. Research Advisory Committees (RACs) or Area Sub-Committees (ASCs)) to support its research vetting and decision-making processes. In 2013, the Association evaluated alternative vetting structures to find ways to improve efficiencies and better optimize use of its volunteer-based expertise network. Since that time, the Association has been convening specialized *ad-hoc or customized* Committees to assist with its research processes and vetting practices. This new approach offers better use of (precious) reviewers' time yet allows the Association to maintain its independent arms-length research decision making practice.

4.1 Committee selection process

The OERA *recruits* its committee members and peer reviewers from a network of local, national, and international experts working in government (federal and provincial), academia, not-for-profits and industry. All committee and peer review activities are undertaken on a volunteer basis. Selection is based on various factors including: subject area, technical requirements, jurisdictional considerations, as well as the levels of government and its agencies involved in the Call or initiative.

The Association *customizes* its selection of Committee and peer reviewers to ensure research decision making is guided by knowledgeable individuals offering a fair and balanced mix of perspectives. Ultimately, the goal is to fund the best and most relevant research to develop the offshore petroleum and renewables industries.

All committee members and peer reviewers are bound by a Confidentiality Agreement and provided with a Terms of Reference in advance of any evaluations to guide their responsibilities. The names of the Committee members and peer reviewers are kept in confidence.

4.2 Committee Types

4.2.1 Petroleum/Geosciences

4.2.1.1 Research Management Committee (RMC)
An RMC is formed to support different petroleum related research initiatives on behalf of the Association. RMC expertise may be used to set research priorities; develop specialized research programs; determine specific projects under different programs; provide technical oversight; and/or help refine scopes of work for certain projects.

For priority setting and future program development, the RMC will make recommendations to the Board for their consideration and approval. For technical oversight and input on scope of work, the RMC will work with OERA staff who will administer and implement RMC recommendations.

4.2.1.2 Research Program Technical Committee (RPTC)
On larger scope petroleum related projects, a special technical committee may be formed and is referred to as the Research Program Technical Committee (RPTC). The RPTC provides oversight and

direction on technical related information for proposed work and active projects, as well, may be asked to advise on technical aspects for new research programs.

4.2.2   Marine Renewables

4.2.2.1 Project Management Committee (PMC) or Technical Advisory Group (TAG)

For all larger scope renewables related RFPs, OERA staff will create a Project Management Committee (also known as a Technical Advisory Group or TAG) to support the research review process. PMC/TAG members are tasked with vetting and evaluating Letters of Intent (LOIs) as well as shortlisted full proposals.   Further, the PMC/TAG is tasked with developing the funding recommendations for presentation to the OERA Board for approval. All committee evaluations are confidential and archived on the OERA server so that appropriate records are available supporting any/all decision paths.

PMC/TAG members may also be asked to review progress and/or final reports associated with funded projects. Their opinions can be additional support to the Research Manager to help monitor project progress and/or offer guidance on technical matters or risks. Where appropriate, PMC/TAG opinions may be shared (anonymously) with the project proponent if helpful in supporting the objectives and/or to avert further risks.

In exceptional cases, the PMC/TAG member's name may be shared with a proponent who is interested in seeking specific (PMC/TAG) expertise, to possibly guide the direction of the research. Before any communications exchanges take place, the OERA Research Manager first will seek permission of the PMC/TAG member to release his/her name to the proponent, ie. lift the standard confidentiality agreement. The peer reviewer, of course, can decide to keep their name in confidence from the proponent. The Research Manager will respond accordingly to the wishes of all parties involved in the information exchange.

5.   Proposal Evaluation Process

All proposals received under an RFP competition are subjected to a peer reviewed proposal evaluation process. The following summarizes OERA's standard two-stage (ie. Letter of Intent and Full proposal) RFP evaluation process. Also, please see Figure 1 (Flow Chart) that illustrates this process:

- The RFP is announced and is issued to a set distribution list and posted on the OERA website.
- Applicants submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) before/on the deadline date set out in the RFP. Typically, applicants are given 2-3 weeks to prepare an LOI;
- OERA staff review all LOIs to check eligibility and compliance against the RFP requirements. Should a proposal not meet the minimum requirements and/or not be of acceptable quality, OERA staff has the discretion to remove the application from further consideration.
- All LOIs are evaluated, scored and rated by the designated Committee (eg. RMC or PMC/TAG – see Section 3.2) that has been assembled specifically for the competition. Adherence to this process allows decision making on funding awards to be made at arms-length to OERA management and staff.
- In cooperation with OERA staff, the set of LOI evaluations are considered to determine a short list of applicants to invite to the full proposal stage. Notice of invitation is sent out to

proponents by email. LOI applicants not invited to the full proposal stage are also notified by email at this time.

- Invited proponents are given ~30 days to prepare and submit a full proposal.
- Once all full proposals have been submitted, staff will again undertake a check for eligibility and compliance against the requirements and criteria prior to handing over the set of proposals to the review Committee. Should a proposal not meet the minimum requirements, the proposal will be removed from further consideration. Noted however, in circumstances where there is a minor issue or perhaps need for clarification, staff may request the proponent to modify that would allow the application to continue to move through the process.
- The Committee is given ~one (1) month to evaluate and score the set of full proposals. At any point during this evaluation stage, a Committee member may ask for clarification and/or additional information from an applicant prior finalizing the proposal score. The OERA Research Manager will act as liaison with the applicant to acquire such information, whom are given a maximum five (5) business days to respond.
- Once all proposals have been evaluated, the Committee will convene (in person for those local to the Halifax area, or dial-in for others) to discuss and rank the proposals and make recommendations for funding.
- The recommendation(s) are reviewed and considered by the Executive Director first, then submitted to the OERA Board for final approval of funding award. Board discussion of the recommendations and consequent decision-making (to approve, reject, or apply conditions) takes place at the BOD quarterly meeting that immediately follows the completion of the Call.
- Once funding decisions are finalized by the Board, the Research Manager will notify the successful applicant(s) by email regarding the award decision. Unsuccessful applicants will also be notified by email at this time.
- Immediately following the award e-notifications, the Research Manager will commence preparation of the draft Contribution Agreement for each successful project proponent.