



## Information for Peer Reviewers

### Policies and Responsibilities of Members of the CJACBR Editorial Review Board<sup>1</sup>

The following types of submissions to the CJACBR are peer reviewed: Articles (Research & Development, ACBR, OCAP, Professional Development, and Dissemination) and Student and International work.

The following types of submissions are not usually peer-reviewed: Correspondence, Letters, Stories, Reviews, and Commentary. Nevertheless, articles published in these sections, particularly if they present technical information, may be peer-reviewed at the CJACBR's discretion.

For any questions about the journal and its policies not addressed here, referees can contact CAAN directly at [info@caan.ca](mailto:info@caan.ca). Questions about a specific manuscript, however, should first be addressed to the CAAN Director of Research and Programs.

#### 1. General Role of the Editorial Review Board

The primary role of the Editorial Review Board is to evaluate submissions to the CJACBR for annual publication, to rate them so that they may be ranked in order of priority and to recommend the successful submissions. CAAN will rarely depart from the priority rating recommendation of the Board.

Board members are asked to flag submissions with special concerns, for example, ethical issues, eligibility, compatibility with the CJACBR policies and CAAN's priorities, etc. Such concerns, however, should not prevent a Board member from evaluating the merit of a submission and choosing to make recommendations for corrective action. These concerns should be flagged and will be taken into account when making a final decision on whether to include the submission.

#### 2. Confidentiality

All documents and information provided for the purpose of peer review by the CJACBR and any discussion concerning them must be treated as strictly confidential and must not be used for any purpose beyond that for which they are intended. All materials related to the review process must be stored in a secure manner to prevent unauthorized access. They must be transmitted using secure carriers and technologies. When documentation is no longer required, it must be destroyed using a secure method such as file deletion, shredding or returning materials to CAAN for destruction. All inquiries received by members of the Editorial Review Board concerning the review of any submission should be referred to the CAAN Director of Research and Programs.

### 3. Conflict of Interest

*Full Conflict of Interest Policies are available upon request from CAAN or they can be downloaded from [www.caan.ca](http://www.caan.ca).*

For the purposes of this statement, conflict of interest is defined as that which, through their potential influence on behaviour or content or from perception of such potential influences, could undermine the objectivity, integrity or perceived value of a publication. Essentially, the question could be asked would ‘any undeclared competing interests embarrass you were they to become publicly known after the work was published.’

CAAN uses a blind peer-review process. Authors are provided with a list of the Editorial Review Board members and asked to inform CAAN of any related interests, including those described below that might be perceived as relevant. Reviewers are also encouraged to identify a conflict if they feel one exists despite the blind review process. However, just as conflict of interest does not automatically invalidate the conclusions of a paper, nor do they automatically disqualify a reviewer from evaluating it. CAAN will consider these statements when distributing submissions to reviewers.

**Conflict of interest for reviewers may include one or more of the following examples:**

- Are from the same immediate institution or company as the primary author;
- Are not currently co-authoring other materials or working with the primary author in a collaboration or publication;
- Are a professional associate\* of the primary author;
- Are a close friend or relative of the primary author;
- Have had long-standing professional/personal differences with the primary author;
- Are a salaried employee or are negotiating employment with the institution of the primary author, except in multi-component organizations in which the components are sufficiently independent;
- Have received or could receive direct financial benefit of any amount, from the organization/institution referenced in the article or primary author.

\* (professional associate is defined as any colleague, scientific mentor, supervisor or student with whom the reviewer is conducting research or other professional activities at the time of the review.)

### 4. Selecting Editorial Board Members

Reviewer selection is critical to the peer review process, and we base our choice on many factors, including First Nation, Inuit and Métis representation, regional perspectives, expertise, reputation, and specific community recommendations.

We check with potential peer-reviewers before sending them manuscripts to review. Reviewers should bear in mind that these messages contain confidential information, which should be treated as such.

## 5. The peer-review system

It is CAAN's experience that the peer-review process is an essential part of the publication process, which improves the manuscripts we publish. Not only does peer-review provide an independent assessment of the importance and technical accuracy of the results described, but the feedback from reviewers conveyed to authors frequently results in manuscripts being refined so that they are more accessible to readers.

The CJACBR is appreciative of its peer-reviewers; it is only by collaboration with our reviewers that we can ensure that the materials we publish are among the most important in the field. We appreciate the time that reviewers devote to assessing the materials we send them, which helps ensure that CJACBR publishes only material of the very highest quality. We thank our reviewers for their commitment to our publication process.

All submissions to the CJACBR are sent for blind peer-review by the members of the Editorial Review Board. Authors are welcome to suggest suitable independent reviewers and may also request that CAAN excludes one or two individuals or organizations if there is a specific, declared conflict of interest.

As a condition of agreeing to review materials, all reviewers agree to keep CJACBR manuscripts confidential, and not to redistribute them without permission from CAAN. If a reviewer seeks advice from colleagues while assessing a manuscript, he or she ensures that confidentiality is maintained and that the names of any such colleagues are provided to CAAN with the final report. By this and by other means, CAAN attempts to keep the content of all submissions confidential until the publication date. Although CAAN goes to every effort to ensure reviewers honour their promise to ensure confidentiality, it is not responsible for the conduct of reviewers.

**Reviewers should be aware that it is CAAN's policy to list their names as members of the Editorial Review Board.** Authors will receive summary feedback from the Board as a whole, individuals will not be identified. Frank comments about the scientific content of submitted manuscripts is strongly encouraged however, CAAN requests reviewers refrain from unnecessarily personally negative comments about submitted manuscripts.

## 6. Criteria for publication

The CJACBR values all submissions therefore; we ask reviewers to keep in mind that every paper that is accepted could mean that another good paper may be rejected. To be published in the CJACBR, a paper should meet five general criteria:

- Demonstrates the implementation of OCAP principles
- Provides strong evidence for its conclusions.
- Novel information
- Of importance and relevance to the Aboriginal HIV/AIDS movement in Canada.
- Interesting to the broad audience of the CJACBR and researchers in other disciplines.

In general, to be acceptable, a paper should represent an advance in understanding likely to influence thinking in the field and motivate action.

## 7. Access to the literature

If a reviewer does not have access to any published paper that is necessary for evaluation of a submitted manuscript, CAAN will supply the reviewer with a copy. Under these circumstances, the reviewer should send the publication reference of the paper required to the person who sent them the paper to review. CAAN will obtain the paper, and send it to the reviewer.

## 8. The review process

All submitted manuscripts received by the deadline date are reviewed by CAAN staff. Late submissions are rarely considered. To save authors and reviewers time, only those papers that seem most likely to meet our editorial criteria are sent for formal review. Those papers judged by the staff to be of insufficient general interest or otherwise inappropriate are rejected promptly without external review (although these decisions may be based on informal advice from experts in the field).

Manuscripts judged to be of potential interest to our readership are sent for formal, blind peer-review. Based on the reviewers' advice there are several possibilities for the submission:

- **Accept**, with or without editorial revisions
- Invite the authors to **revise their manuscript** to address specific concerns before a final decision is reached
- Reject, but indicate to the authors that **further work might justify a resubmission**
- **Reject outright**, typically on grounds of lack of relevance or major technical and/or interpretational problems

Reviewers are welcome to recommend a particular course of action, but they should bear in mind that other reviewers may have different technical expertise and/or views, and a decision may be based on conflicting advice. The most useful review reports, therefore, provide information on which a decision should be based. Setting out the arguments for and against publication is often as helpful as a direct recommendation one way or the other.

Reviewers will meet together, in person or via teleconference, to discuss recommendations and decide by consensus which submissions will be published. Editorial decisions are not solely a matter of counting votes or numerical rank assessments. Every effort will be made to consider the strength of the arguments raised by each reviewer and by the authors, and we may also consider other information not available to either party. The primary responsibilities of the CJACBR is to our readers and to the scientific community at large, and in deciding how best to serve them, we must weigh the claims of each paper against the others also under consideration.

CAAN tries to ensure a maximum load for an Editorial Review Board meeting. No more than 10 submissions will be reviewed at one time for a conference call or 20 submissions for a 1 day in-person meeting. No member of the Editorial Review Board will be asked to review more than 10 submissions.

We may return to reviewers for further advice, particularly in cases where reviewers disagree with each other, or where the authors believe they have been misunderstood on points of fact. We therefore ask that reviewers should be willing to provide follow-up advice as requested. We are very aware, however, that reviewers have multiple demands on their time, so we try to keep consultation to the minimum we judge necessary to provide a fair hearing for the authors.

When reviewers agree to review a paper, we consider this a commitment to review subsequent revisions. However, CAAN will not send resubmitted papers to the reviewers if it seems that the authors have not made a serious attempt to address the reviewers' criticisms.

We take reviewers' criticisms very seriously, and in particular, we are very reluctant to disregard technical criticisms. In cases where one reviewer alone opposes publication, we may consult with the other reviewers as to whether s/he is applying an unduly critical standard.

## 9. Writing the review

CAAN aims to support innovative research that will make significant submissions to knowledge, policy development, practice in the field of HIV disease and community mobilization. Evidence of originality, clear thinking and the production of a high quality publication is sought in preference to elaborations on existing knowledge, lack of focus, or large numbers of not very important papers.

The primary purpose of the review is to provide insight and recommendations regarding which submissions to publish in the CJACBR. The review should also instruct the authors on how they can strengthen their paper, if applicable. As far as possible, a negative review should explain to the authors the weaknesses of their manuscript, so that rejected authors can understand the basis for the decision and see in broad terms what needs to be done to improve the manuscript for publication elsewhere. This is secondary to the other functions, however, and reviewers should not feel obliged to provide detailed, constructive advice to authors of papers that do not meet the criteria for the CJACBR.

Confidential comments to the Editorial Review Board are welcome, but it is helpful if the main points are stated in the comments for transmission to the authors. The ideal review should consider the following questions:

- Does the paper contribute to a deeper understanding of Aboriginal Peoples, HIV/AIDS and related issues?
- Who will be interested in reading the paper, and why?
- What are the major claims of the paper? Are the claims convincing? If not, what further evidence is needed?
- Is there clear evidence of community involvement; consultation, support for the project, benefit from the results?
- Are the claims appropriately discussed in the context of previous literature?
- Is there other information that would strengthen the paper further?
- Would further work improve it? How difficult would this be? Would it take a long time?
- If the manuscript is unacceptable, is the study promising enough to encourage the authors to resubmit? What specific work is needed to make it acceptable?

### **Other questions for reviewers to consider**

We appreciate that reviewers are very busy, and we are very grateful if they can answer the questions in the section above. However, if time is available, it is extremely helpful if reviewers can advise on the following points:

- Is the manuscript clearly written? If not, how could it be made more clear or accessible?
- Could the manuscript be shortened?
- Should the authors be asked to provide supplementary methods or data on the CAAN web site? (Such data might include more detail regarding methodology, process utilized for engaging community members or further reading on a specific topic.)
- Have the authors done themselves justice without overselling their claims?
- Have they been fair in their treatment of previous literature?
- Is the statistical analysis of the data sound?
- Are there any special ethical concerns arising from the use of human subjects?

*A review form is included as an appendix to these policies.*

### 10. Timing

CAAN is committed to timely editorial decisions and publication, and we believe that an efficient editorial process is a valuable service both to our authors and to the community as a whole. We therefore ask reviewers to respond promptly (normally within 14 days of receiving a manuscript, although this may be either longer or shorter by prior arrangement). A timeframe will be developed with all Editorial Review Board members to allow for meeting together to finalize the submissions to be published.

### 11. Anonymity

CAAN publishes the names of Editorial Review Board members however; we do not release reviewers' individual comments to authors or to other reviewers. We ask authors to review the list of members on the Editorial Review Board and identify any members they feel may be placed in a position of conflict of interest should they receive a submission even within the blind review process used by the CJACBR.

As a matter of policy, we do not suppress reviewers' reports; any comments that were intended for the authors are transmitted, regardless of what we may think of the content. On rare occasions, we may edit a report to remove offensive language or comments that reveal confidential information about other matters. We ask reviewers to avoid statements that may cause needless offence; conversely, we strongly encourage reviewers to state plainly their opinion of a paper. We deplore any attempt by authors to confront reviewers.

## 12. Ethics

CAAN may seek advice about submitted papers not only from technical reviewers but also on any aspect of a paper that raises concerns. These may include, for example, ethical issues or issues of data or materials access. Very occasionally, concerns may also relate to the societal implications of publishing a paper, including threats to security. In such circumstances, advice will usually be sought simultaneously with the peer-review process. As in all publishing decisions, the ultimate decision whether to publish is the responsibility of the CJACBR.

## 13. Appeals

If the CJACBR declines to publish a paper and does not suggest resubmission, authors are strongly advised to submit their paper for publication elsewhere. If an author wishes to appeal against the CJACBR's decision, the appeal must be made in writing, not by telephone, and should be confined to the scientific case for publication. CAAN's staff is unable to assign high priority to consideration of appeals.

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<sup>1</sup> *The CJACBR peer review process and policies are modeled on that of the Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN) and Nature Magazine and reviewed by Project Steering committee members for the “Enhancing Dissemination: Including Establishing an Aboriginal Community-Based HIV/AIDS Peer Reviewed Research (Annual) Journal, Promoting a Web Presence and Conference Participation” project, the inaugural members of the Editorial Review Board, and members of the CAAN Research Unit. CAAN gratefully acknowledges the contribution of the reviewers and the open access policy of the OHTN and Nature magazine.*

# Appendix A



# CJACBR Reviewer Assessment Form

**Instructions:** Please use this form to provide concise feedback for each paper you have been asked to review. Refer to the scale provided at the end of this form for assistance in determining your final score.

Please refer to the CJACBR Policies and Responsibilities of Members of the CJACBR Editorial Review Board (Writing the review, section 9) for further details.

**Submission Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

**How will this paper benefit the Aboriginal HIV/AIDS community?**

**Relevance** to CJACBR and CAAN mission, mandate; to HIV/AIDS and Aboriginal Peoples; to policy development and supporting action.

**Demonstration of implementation of OCAP principles** – direction set by community stakeholders in the development, conduct and dissemination of research.

**Ethical issues/concerns?**

**Is the science in the research sound?** Is there an appropriate description of the methods used? What approach was used for analysis? Do the findings match the data presented?

<p>Comment on the <b>overall academic quality of the content</b> of the paper – is enough information provided to assess the study? Are the conclusions clear and logical? Appropriate references and bibliography?</p>
<p><b>Is the paper clearly written</b> – plain language where possible, clear use of terminology, etc.</p>
<p><b>Summary statement</b> – 100 – 200 word statement (point form is fine) with comments related to final score.</p>
<p><b>Final Score /4:</b></p>

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Description	Score
<p><b>Outstanding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accept without editorial revisions.</li> </ul>	<b>4</b>
<p><b>Very Good</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accept with editorial revisions.</li> </ul>	<b>3</b>
<p><b>Acceptable but needs revision</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invite the authors to revise their manuscript to address specific concerns before a final decision is reached.</li> </ul>	<b>2</b>
<p><b>Needs major revision</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reject, but indicate to the authors that further work might justify a resubmission.</li> </ul>	<b>1</b>
<p><b>Rejected</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reject outright, typically on grounds of lack of relevance or major technical and/or interpretational problems.</li> </ul>	<b>0</b>