

## Considering the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the evaluation of funding applications

### Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected and continues to affect many researchers and students. In some cases, these impacts have led to a slowdown or even halt of research or training activities planned for 2020. For example, the inability to access a laboratory, to meet with people involved in a project or to conduct field research may have led to the modification, postponement or even abandonment of a research project. Similarly, restrictions on travel or gatherings may have led to the cancellation of an internship or conference presentation, or the need to quickly convert a symposium into a webinar.

Research and training activities may also have slowed down for personal, family or health reasons. The closure of childcare centres and schools, in particular, has led to increased parental workloads, often making it difficult to balance work and family life. It is easy to imagine, for example, how difficult it can be to write a scientific article, a book chapter or a thesis when you are caring for a young child full time or homeschooling. In fact, in the early months of the pandemic, there was a decline in the number of scientific papers submitted by women, particularly those at an early stage in their career<sup>1</sup>, which is attributed in part to their greater share, on average, of domestic and caregiving responsibilities<sup>2</sup>.

The stress caused by the illness or death of a loved one, the loss of a spouse's job, or living in a neighbourhood particularly affected by COVID-19 may also have affected the ability of some members of the scientific community to undertake or complete projects. Similarly, people with disabilities, compromised immune systems or chronic illness may also have faced particular challenges that slowed down their activities.

The transition to online courses also proved more difficult for faculty members less experienced with distance education technologies, as well as for many students, especially those with children or caring for an older or vulnerable family member. Other examples include students from low-income families, who may not have access to a personal computer, and for whom the financial impact of the pandemic may be more severe; students who have returned to areas with limited Internet access; students working in the health care field, or who have lost their jobs or housing, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent-Lamarre P., Sugimoto C. & Larivière V. [The decline of women's research production during the coronavirus pandemic](#), Nature Index, May 19, 2020

<sup>2</sup> Frederickson, M. [Pandémie : les femmes font moins de recherche que les hommes](#), La Conversation, May 18, 2020.

## Description of the measure and instructions for applicants

Considering the extent of the disruptions caused by COVID-19, and the impact they may have had on the careers of those affected, the Fonds de recherche du Québec (FRQ) has implemented a measure to take into account, in the evaluation of funding applications, the impacts of the pandemic on applicants' research and training activities. This measure, which aims to avoid penalizing those for whom these impacts have been more significant, will apply as of the fall 2020 competitions and will continue over the next few years.

Accordingly, applicants for FRQ funding will have the opportunity, if they wish, to include with their application form a document of **no more than two pages** describing the impacts of the pandemic on their research or training activities. This document will be sent with the application form to the members of the evaluation committees, who will have to take the information provided into consideration when evaluating the application. The committees will receive specific instructions to this effect.

In this document, applicants are invited to:

- 1) describe how the pandemic has affected their research or training activities, specifying the type of activities affected and the period when their activities slowed down or stopped, if applicable;
- 2) explain how these impacts are reflected in their application for funding (e.g. decrease in academic average, delays in submitting a paper, etc.).

The situations described above are only examples. More generally, applicants are encouraged to report any impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that may have affected the competitiveness of their funding application. However, they are not required to provide details about their personal situation or information that they would consider confidential. If their activities slowed down or stopped due to personal, family or health circumstances, it is possible to simply indicate the nature of these circumstances (e.g., illness, family responsibilities, bereavement, etc.), without providing personal details.

It is important to note that **the information provided in this document will not be used to determine the eligibility of the funding application** and this document cannot be used to request accommodation from the FRQ. It will only be used to provide context for elements of the application during its scientific evaluation.

## Procedure

For applications submitted using the FRQnet platform, the document on the impacts of the pandemic can be attached, in PDF format, in the "Other documents" section, by selecting the document type "Description of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on research activities". For programs not using FRQnet, this document can be attached to the full application.

The decision whether or not to add the pandemic impact document to a funding application is entirely up to the applicant. **This document is optional, and its absence will not affect the eligibility of the application or its evaluation.**

The Fonds de recherche du Québec reserve the right not to forward to the evaluation committees any documents that do not comply with the program rules or presentation standards of the application. These may vary from one program to another and are explained on each program's Web page.