The NIH Peer Review Process

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Integrated Review Group (IRG)
Center for Scientific Review
NIH

Most Applications Go to the NIH Center for Scientific Review (CSR)

Focal Point for Initial Review at NIH

- Receives
- Refers
- Reviews

NIH Peer Review System for Grant Applications

1st Level
Scientific Review Group (Study Section)

2nd Level
NIH Institute/Center Council
Path from Idea to NIH Funding

Help Your Application Get to the Right Study Section

1. List of study sections on CSR website
   - www.csr.nih.gov → Study Sections → Standing Study Sections

Help Your Application Get to the Right Study Section (cont.)

2. Assisted Referral Tool (ART)
   - www.csr.nih.gov → Use our Guided Study Section Selector
Help Your Application Get to the Right Study Section (cont.)

3. NIH RePORTER database

https://projectreporter.nih.gov/reporter.cfm

Assignment Request Form (optional)

- Suggest Institute/Center assignment (+ and -)
- Study Section Requests (+ and -)
- Potential individuals in conflict (and why)
- Areas of expertise needed

Your SRO Convenes the Study Section Meeting
Discussions Focus on the Best Applications

- Reviewers typically discuss the top half

At the Meeting: Application Discussion

- Anyone in conflict with an application leaves the room

At the Meeting: Application Discussion (cont.)

- Anyone in conflict with an application leaves the room
- Reviewer 1 introduces the application and presents critique
- Reviewers 2 and 3 highlight new issues and differences of opinion in areas that significantly impact scores
- All panelists in the room are invited to join the discussion and then vote on the final overall impact score
Main Review Criteria

- Overall Impact
  - Assessment of the likelihood for the project to exert a sustained, powerful influence on the research field(s) involved

- Core Review Criteria
  - Significance
  - Investigator(s)
  - Innovation
  - Approach
  - Environment

Other Issues Considered in Assessing Impact

- Protections of human subjects
- Inclusions of women, minorities and children
- Appropriate use of vertebrate animals
- Management of biohazards

9-Point Scoring Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Impact</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Exceptional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Impact</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low Impact</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fair</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Marginal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scoring

9-point score scale is used to provide:
• Criterion Scores (Significance, Investigator, Innovation, Approach & Environment)
• Overall Impact Score

All applications receive scores:
• Not discussed – initial criterion scores
• Discussed – initial criterion scores & avg overall impact score

Priority Scores/Percentile Rank

• Discussed applications are scored 1 (best) to 9 (worst)
• Average Final Overall Impact Score × 10 = Priority Score
• Percentile based on application’s rank
Your Career Stage Is Considered

• If you are a New Investigator or Early Stage Investigator (R01s)
  – Less emphasis on preliminary data and publications
  – More emphasis on training

Jumpstart Your Career: CSR Early Career Reviewer Program

Early Career Reviewer (ECR) Program Goals

• Train and educate
• Expose to the peer review experience
• Enrich the pool
Qualifications for the Early Career Reviewer (ECR) Program

- Demonstrated training and experience by:
  - A faculty appointment or equivalent
  - An active independent research program
  - At least two senior-authored research publications in peer-reviewed journals in the past two years
- No previous CSR review
- New Investigator

How to Apply for the ECR Program

- Instructions are at www.csr.nih.gov/ECR
- If eligible, your name is entered in ECR database
- You may be invited to serve as an ECR
- You can also email Scientific Review Officers

Personal Observations

- Planning your project
  - Program Officers
  - Study sections
  - Preliminary studies
- Read instructions carefully
- Pay attention to the writing (story)
Personal Observations (cont.)

- Start early
- Note extenuating circumstances in Biosketch
- Publish!
- Get some review experience

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