GENERAL PROCEDURES
BEFORE THE MEETING

The guiding principles for the initial review of research project grant applications are based on Public Health Service Scientific Peer Review Regulations, which state that peer review groups make recommendations concerning the scientific and technical merit of applications. The specific review criteria used to assess the merit of research project grant applications will vary with the types of applications reviewed, such as Investigator-Initiated Research Project Grants (R01), Academic Research Enhancement Awards (R15), National Research Service Awards (F32, F33, etc.), Research Career Development Awards (K) or Small Business Innovation Research Grants.

A Scientific Review Officer (SRO) will provide a set of applications, a copy of the Funding Opportunity Announcement(s) (FOA), critique template(s), and a review assignment list to facilitate the evaluation of the application(s).

To prepare for the review meeting, reviewers should:

1. Become familiar with the FOA if the applications being reviewed were solicited through an RFA or PA/PAR/PAS.
2. Read the section(s) in this manual applicable to the specific grant mechanism(s) that will be reviewed, e.g. Program Project (P01), National Research Service Award (T32, F32), Research Career Development Awards (K) or Small Business Innovation Research Grants.
3. Critique the assigned applications.
4. Primary reviewers will prepare a very brief, non-evaluative description (maximum of two to three minutes) of the overall application that will be presented to the committee as an orientation prior to the evaluation. The non-evaluative description is not to comment on the applicants’ qualifications, the quality of the facilities, or the work/science proposed.

Some General Considerations:

- Several experts will be assigned to review each application. Each expert will prepare a written preliminary critique beforehand for use in the evaluative discussions during the review meeting. The critiques will be anonymously included in the Summary Statement, which is the final documentation of the review.
- An individual reviewer may not have the necessary expertise to evaluate all aspects of each application. However, the combined evaluations of all assigned reviewers will address all aspects of each application. Thus, each reviewer will evaluate the scientific and technical merit of each assigned application from the perspective of his/her expertise and experience. Critiques from all assigned reviewers, regardless of order designation are equally important.
- Each application must be reviewed in strict accordance with the standard evaluation criteria and any additional criteria specific to the FOA. The evaluations of additional special review issues may affect the overall score for an application. These special review issues include human subject protection and representation, vertebrate animal
welfare, biohazard handling, responses to the previous critiques for a resubmission application, and progress made during last funding cycle for a renewal application. The following items are assessed, but are not scored and are not considered in the development of an overall impact score: (i) the budget for appropriateness in meeting the goals of the application; (ii) the use of select agents; (iii) research at foreign institutions or organizations; and (iv) the resource sharing plans (for data, model organisms, and genome-wide association studies).

- Applications may refer to the URLs of co-authored, freely available publications and patents. However, per NIH Guide Notice OD-00-004, all NIH applications are to be self-contained and within specified page limits. Therefore, unless otherwise specified in the FOA, applications should not include other URLs to provide information that is necessary to the review, and reviewers should not view web sites referenced in a particular application. In fact, reviewers should be aware that their anonymity may be compromised if such web sites are accessed.

- The application does not need to be strong in all categories to be judged likely to have a major scientific impact and thus deserve a high impact/priority score. For example, an investigator may propose to carry out important work that, by its nature, is not innovative but is essential to move a field forward.

- Reviewers should assign preliminary scores for each review criterion that will be used to determine a preliminary impact/priority score. Reviewers are asked to justify each preliminary criterion score with appropriate strengths and weaknesses. Do not assign a poor preliminary criterion score without providing appropriate evaluative justification(s).

- To the greatest extent possible, reviewers should be familiar with the content of the non-conflicted applications to which they are not specifically assigned. This familiarity will prepare all committee members to take part in the evaluation and scoring discussions. Each reviewer will score each application with which they have no conflicts, whether or not the reviewer has been assigned to prepare a written critique.

Types of Grant Applications

- The type of application can be identified by various indicators in the “application ID.” A “new” application (designated A0) is identified by the ID number ending in “-01” (e.g., 1 P01 AI123456-01). A new application may propose new research or research from a previous resubmission application that did not receive funding. An application is no longer required to demonstrate substantial changes in scientific direction compared to a previous submission to be considered a “new” application.

- A “resubmission” application is identified by an “A1” suffix at the end of the application ID (e.g., 1 P01 AI123456-01A1). The summary statement from the previous review is available in the Application Folder in IAR. The applicant(s) response to reviewer comments from the original review panel and progress made to date should be evaluated. Reviewers should indicate whether the application is improved, the same, or worse compared to the previous submission in the Resubmission section in the Critique Template.

- A “competing renewal” applications is identified in the application ID by a “2” as the first number and ending in a number other than “-01” (e.g., 2 P01 AI123456-08). Reviewers should evaluate the progress made during the last funding period and add their comments to the Renewal section of the Critique Template.
Submission Policy

- As of April 2014 (NOT-OD-14-074), following an unsuccessful new (A0) or resubmission (A1) application, applicants may submit the same idea as a new (A0) application for the next appropriate due date without substantial changes in scientific direction of the application. This policy applies to all NIH FOAs. When submitting a “new” application after unsuccessful A0 or A1, an introduction page addressing responses to previous critiques is NOT ALLOWED.

- Reviewers should review new applications after unsuccessful A0 or A1 submissions without any bias and/or previous knowledge about the application. They should provide an overall impact score based on the science presented in the application.

- For “new” applications, if the reviewer notices any information that references a previous submission (scores, summary statements, reviewer comments, etc.), the reviewer should contact the SRO immediately and should not continue with the evaluation of the application until after receiving further instructions from the SRO. The SRO will determine whether or not the application should proceed with review because it did not follow NIH New Submission Policy.

- NIH's policy for accepting overlapping applications remains in effect (see NOT-OD-09-100). The NIH will not accept duplicate or highly overlapping applications under review at the same time.

- Resubmission (A1) applications are not accepted if they are submitted later than 37 months after submission of the new (A0) application that it follows (see NOT-OD-12-128 and NOT-OD-10-140).

- Guide Notice NOT-OD-15-059 “Reminders Related to the NIH/AHRQ Policy for Application Submission” was issued to emphasize the following points:
  - A new application is an application that has not been previously proposed or received funding. Whether it follows an unsuccessful application or not, a new application is neither a resubmission application nor a renewal application, and must comply with the rules for a new application.
  - A new application that does not conform to the rules for a new application will not be reviewed and will not be considered for funding.

- Please see the Frequently Asked Questions for Reviewers on NIH Applicant Submission for more information.