GENERAL PROCEDURES
BEFORE THE MEETING

The guiding principles for the initial review of research project grant applications are based on the Public Health Service Scientific Peer Review Regulations, which state that peer review groups make recommendations concerning the scientific merit of applications. The specific 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.), Small Business Innovation Research Grants, etc.

A Scientific Review Officer will provide a set of applications, a copy of the Request for Applications (RFA) or Program Announcement (PA) (if applicable), and a review assignment list.

To prepare for the review meeting, reviewers should:
1. Become familiar with the RFA or PA if the applications being reviewed were solicited through an RFA or PA.
2. Read the section(s) in this manual that are applicable to the review of the specific grant mechanism(s) that will be reviewed, e.g. Program Project (P01), National Research Service Award (T32), Research Career Development Awards (K), etc.
3. Critique the assigned applications.
4. Primary reviewers will prepare a very brief oral description (maximum of two to three minutes) of the overall application that will be used for orienting the committee prior to the evaluation. This should be descriptive only, and it should not comment on the applicant’s qualifications, the quality of the facilities, or the work/science proposed.

Some General Considerations:

- Several individuals will be assigned as reviewers on each application. Each will prepare written critiques for use in discussion during the review meeting and for anonymous inclusion in the final review documentation, the summary statement.
- While an individual reviewer may not have the necessary expertise to evaluate all aspects of each application, the combined efforts of all assigned reviewers should address all aspects. Thus, reviewers should evaluate the scientific merit of each assigned application from the perspective of their own expertise and experience.
- Each application must be reviewed in strict accordance with the standard evaluation criteria and any additional criteria specified in the RFA or PA. In addition, special review issues are evaluated that may affect the overall score for an application. These include human subjects protection and representation, vertebrate animal welfare, and biohazard handling. The budget is assessed, as are select agents, foreign organizations, and resource sharing plans (for data, model organisms, and genome-wide association studies), but these do not enter into scoring the application.
- Applicants may refer to the URLs of their co-authored, freely available publications and patents. However, per NIH Guide Notice OD-00-004, all applications and proposals for
NIH funding are to be self-contained within specified page limitations. Therefore, unless otherwise specified in an NIH solicitation, applicants should not use other URLs to provide information that is necessary to the review, and reviewers are under no obligation to view web sites that are referenced in a particular application. In fact, reviewers are cautioned that their anonymity may be compromised when they directly access such a web site.

- For renewal and revision applications, preliminary data and/or progress to date must be evaluated. For resubmitted applications, reviewers evaluate the response to the previous review. They should indicate whether the application is improved, the same, or worse than the previous submission.

- 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.

- As reviewers prepare critiques, they will assign preliminary scores according to each review criterion and determine a preliminary impact/priority score.

- Reviewers should be familiar with the content of the applications to which they are not specifically assigned. This will prepare them to take part in the discussions and score other applications. After hearing the discussion, each reviewer will be asked to score all applications with which they have no conflicts, whether or not they have been assigned to prepare a written critique.