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Office of Extramural Research

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NIH...Turning Discovery Into Health

NIH Office of Extramural Research Website
http://grants.nih.gov/grants/oer.htm

NIAID Grants Tutorial website
https://www.niaid.nih.gov/grants-contracts/apply-grant

Scoring System and Procedure

The NIH scoring system was designed to encourage reliable scoring of applications. Reviewers or study sections who assign high ratings to all applications diminish their ability to communicate the scientific impact of an individual application. Therefore, reviewers who carefully consider the rating guidance below can improve the reliability of their scores as well as their ability to communicate the scientific impact of the applications reviewed.

Contents

SCORING

Summary

- The NIH grant application scoring system uses a 9-point scale for both overall impact scores and scores for individual review criteria.
  - For both types of score, ratings are in whole numbers only (no decimal ratings).
  - NIH expects that scores of 1 or 9 to be used less frequently than the other scores.
- For the overall impact score,
  - the scale is used by all eligible (without conflict of interest) SRG (Scientific Review Group) members
  - 5 is considered an average score.
- For criterion scores,
  - the scale is used by the assigned reviewers to evaluate (at least) five individual criteria (e.g., Significance, Investigator(s), Innovation, Approach, Environment).
  - reviewers should consider the strengths and weaknesses within each criterion. For example, a major strength may outweigh many minor and correctable weaknesses.
- For information about using the critique template, see Critique Template Instructions

Preliminary Scores

- Before the review meeting, assigned reviewers determine preliminary scores for each of the scored review criteria and a preliminary score for the overall impact
- The impact score should reflect the reviewer's overall evaluation, not a numerical average of individual criterion scores
- Reviewers should consider the full range of the rating scale and the scoring descriptors in assigning preliminary and final scores
  - However, a reviewer should not assume that the applications assigned to him/her necessarily cover that entire range of scores, and should assign scores as appropriate for the work or science proposed
- An application does not need to be strong in all categories to be judged likely to have major impact

- For example, a project that by its nature is not innovative may be essential to advance a field
- Reviewers must enter the criterion scores into the Internet Assisted Review (IAR) site in the NIH Commons for them to appear in the summary statement
    - If entered in IAR, the scores will be transferred to a table at the beginning of the reviewer's critique
- Assigned reviewers may submit criterion scores only after their critiques have been uploaded
    - At the SRO's discretion, SRG members assigned as discussants may submit criterion scores without critiques
- In the READ phase of the meeting reviewers may submit their scores and critiques, but may not edit them
- Final scores are given by private scoring and are based on the outcome of the deliberations at the peer review meeting

Criterion Scoring

- In most cases, five individual criteria are scored, but certain Funding Opportunity Announcements may include more than five scored criteria
- Criterion scores are provided for all applications
- Criterion scores are intended to convey how each assigned reviewer weighed the strengths and weaknesses of each section
- Providing scores without providing comments in the review critique is discouraged
- The impact score for the application is not intended to be an average of criterion scores
- Criterion scores are entered into the Internet Assisted Review site for the meeting; the same screen also allows uploading of the written critique at the same time
- If the reviewer's opinion changed as a result of discussion at the meeting, the reviewer should change his/her criterion scores to match his/her critiques and overall impact score as part of the EDIT phase
- The criterion scores appear in a table at the beginning of each critique in the summary statement

Impact Score

- Discussed applications receive numerical impact scores from all eligible reviewers (e.g., without conflicts of interest)
- The impact score for an application is based on each individual reviewer's assessment of the scored criteria plus additional criteria regarding the protection and inclusion of human subjects; vertebrate animal care and welfare; biohazards, and criteria specific to the funding opportunity
- Reviewers are guided to use the full range of the rating scale and spread their scores to better discriminate among applications
- Reviewers whose evaluations or opinions of an application fall outside the range of those presented by the assigned reviewers and discussant(s) should ensure that their opinions are brought to the attention of the entire committee
- In addition, the SRO and Chairperson should ensure that all opinions are voiced before final scoring is conducted
- Reviewers should feel free to assign the score that they believe best represents the impact of the application, and not feel constrained to limit their scores to the upper half of the score range if they do not feel such a score is warranted

- Reviewers will score an application as presented in its entirety, and may not modify their scores on the assumption that a portion of the work proposed will be deleted or modified according to the SRG's recommendations
- After the meeting, individual reviewer scores will be averaged and the result multiplied by 10 to determine the final impact score
- The range of the final application scores is 10 through 90

Non-Numeric Scores

- Not Discussed (ND)
  - Applications unanimously judged by the peer review committee to be less competitive are not discussed at the peer review meeting
  - These applications do not receive a numerical impact score
  - These applications do receive individual criterion scores
  - Not all meetings use the "Not Discussed" option
- Not Recommended for Further Consideration (NRFC)
  - NR for an application occurs by majority vote of the SRG members
  - NR occurs in the following scenarios:
    - Application lacks significant and substantial merit
    - Application presents serious ethical problems in the protection of human subjects from research risks
    - Application presents serious ethical problems in the use of vertebrate animals, biohazards, and/or select agents
  - NR-scored applications do not proceed to the second level of peer review (National Advisory Council/Board) because they cannot be funded
  - The NR is a serious committee recommendation that is substantially different from Not Discussed (ND)
- Other Non-numeric Scores
  - DF: Deferred (usually due to lack of sufficient information or quorum, allegations of research misconduct)
  - AB: Abstention (used rarely)
  - CF: Conflict (score put in by a reviewer who is in conflict with the application)
  - NP: Not Present

Reviewer Guidance

- The table below provides a guide for reviewers in assigning overall impact scores and individual criterion scores.
- Overall impact, for a research project, is the project's likelihood to have a sustained, powerful influence on the research field(s) involved, but may be defined differently for different types of applications.
- Each review criterion should be assessed based on the strength of that criterion in the context of the work being proposed
  - As a result, a reviewer may give only moderate scores to some of the review criteria but still give a high overall impact score because the one review criterion critically important to the research is rated highly; or a reviewer could give mostly high criterion ratings but rate the overall impact score lower because the one criterion critically important to the research being proposed is not highly rated.
- An application does not need to be strong in all categories to be judged likely to have major impact, e.g., a project that by its nature is not innovative may be essential to advance a field.
- A score of 5 is a good, medium-impact application.
- The entire scale (1-9) should always be considered.

Overall Impact or Criterion Strength	Score	Descriptor
High	1	Exceptional
	2	Outstanding
	3	Excellent
Medium	4	Very Good
	5	Good
	6	Satisfactory
Low	7	Fair
	8	Marginal
	9	Poor
Other Designations for Final Outcome		
AB	Abstention	
CF	Conflict of Interest	
DF	Deferred	
ND	Not Discussed	
NP	Not Present	
NR	Not Recommended for Further Consideration	

See specific guidance for Research Applications and Training Applications.

Additional Scoring Guidance: Applications for Fellowships, Career Awards, and Institutional Training Grants

The NIH scoring system was designed to encourage reliable scoring of applications. Reviewers or study sections who assign high ratings to all applications diminish their ability to communicate the scientific impact of an individual application. Therefore, reviewers who carefully consider the rating guidance below can improve the reliability of their scores as well as their ability to communicate the scientific impact of the applications reviewed.

The charts below were developed to encourage reviewers to consider strengths as well as weaknesses when evaluating applications for fellowships, career awards, and institutional training grants.

FELLOWSHIPS & CAREER AWARDS

Overall Impact:
The likelihood that the proposed training (F) or career development (K) will enhance the candidate's potential for a productive, independent scientific research career in a health-related field.

Overall Impact	High	Medium	Low
Score	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9

Evaluating Overall Impact
Consider the 5 criteria
(weighting based on reviewer's judgment):

Fs	Ks
• Applicant	• Candidate
• Sponsor(s)	• Career Development Plan/Goals*
• Research Training Plan	• Research Plan
• Training Potential	• Mentor(s)**
• Institutional Environment & Commitment	• Environment & Institutional Commitment

and other score influences, e.g. human subjects, animal welfare, inclusion plans, and biohazards

*K05 and K24: Plan to Provide Mentoring
**K02: Consultants/Collaborators

e.g. Proposes training or career development of high value/benefit for the candidate who has high potential for developing into a productive, independent scientist. May have some or no weaknesses in the criteria.

e.g. Proposes training or career development of high or moderate value/benefit for the candidate who has high or moderate potential for further development, but weaknesses in the criteria reduce the overall impact to medium.

e.g. Proposes training or career development of moderate value/benefit for the candidate who shows moderate potential. May have some weaknesses in the criteria.

e.g. Proposes training or career development of moderate or low value/benefit for the candidate who has moderate or low potential for further development. Weaknesses in the criteria reduce the overall impact to low.

e.g. Proposes training or career development of low value/benefit for the candidate who shows low potential. May have some weaknesses in the criteria.

5 is a good, medium-impact application. The entire scale (1-9) should always be considered.

K01/K07/K08/K18/K22/K23/K25/K43/K99 Review

If you cannot access the hyperlinks below,
visit http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/critiques/k_D.htm.

Application #:

Principal Investigator(s):

OVERALL IMPACT

Reviewers will provide an overall impact score to reflect their assessment of the likelihood for the candidate to maintain a strong research program, in consideration of the following five scored review criteria, and additional review criteria. An application does not need to be strong in all categories to have a major impact.

Overall Impact *Write a paragraph summarizing the factors that informed your Overall Impact score.*

SCORED REVIEW CRITERIA

Reviewers will consider each of the five review criteria below in the determination of scientific and technical merit, and give a separate score for each.

1. Candidate
Strengths   •   **Weaknesses**   •

2. Career Development Plan/Career Goals & Objectives/Plan to Provide Mentoring
Strengths   •   **Weaknesses**   •

3. Research Plan
Strengths   •   **Weaknesses**   •

4. Mentor(s), Co-Mentor(s), Consultant(s), Collaborator(s)
Strengths

•
Weaknesses
•

5. <u>Environment and Institutional Commitment to the Candidate</u>
Strengths
•
Weaknesses
•

ADDITIONAL REVIEW CRITERIA

As applicable for the project proposed, reviewers will consider the following additional items in the determination of scientific and technical merit, but will not give separate scores for these items**.**

— A response for Protections for Human Subjects, Vertebrate Animals, and Biohazards **is required from reviewers for all applications**.

— A response for Inclusion of Women, Minorities and Children **is required from reviewers** for Human Subjects Research Applications.

<u>Protections for Human Subjects</u>
Click Here to Select
Comments (Required Unless Not Applicable):
•
Data and Safety Monitoring Plan (Applicable for Clinical Trials Only):
Click Here to Select
Comments (Required Unless Not Applicable):
○

<u>Inclusion of Women, Minorities and Children</u> **Applicable Only for Human Subjects research and not IRB Exemption #4.**
• Sex/Gender: Click Here to Select
• Race/Ethnicity: Click Here to Select
• For NIH-Defined Phase III trials, Plans for valid design and analysis: Click Here to Select
• Inclusion/Exclusion of Children under 18: Click Here to Select
Comments (Required Unless Not Applicable):
•

<u>Vertebrate Animals</u>

Is the proposed research involving vertebrate animals scientifically appropriate, including the justifications for animal usage and protections for research animals described in the Vertebrate Animal section (and method of euthanasia described in the Cover Page Supplement or PHS Fellowship Supplemental Form, if applicable)?
Click Here to Select
Comments (Required Unless Not Applicable):
•

Biohazards
Click Here to Select
Comments (Required Unless Not Applicable):
•

Resubmission
Comments (if applicable):
•

Renewal (Applicable only for K02 and K24)
Comments (if applicable):
•

Revision
Comments (if applicable):
•

ADDITIONAL REVIEW CONSIDERATIONS

As applicable for the project proposed, reviewers will address each of the following items, but will not give scores for these items and should not consider them in providing an overall impact score.

Training in the Responsible Conduct of Research
Click Here to Select
Comments on Format (Required):
•
Comments on Subject Matter (Required):
•
Comments on Faculty Participation (Required; not applicable for mid- and senior-career awards):
•

Comments on Duration (Required):
•
Comments on Frequency (Required):
•

[Select Agents](#)
Click Here to Select
Comments (Required Unless Not Applicable):
•

[Resource Sharing Plans](#)
Click Here to Select
Comments (Required if Unacceptable):
•

[Authentication of Key Biological and/or Chemical Resources](#)
Click Here to Select
Comments (Required if Unacceptable):
•

[Budget and Period of Support](#)
Click Here to Select
Recommended budget modifications or possible overlap identified:
•

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS TO APPLICANT

Reviewers may provide guidance to the applicant or recommend against resubmission without fundamental revision.

[Additional Comments to Applicant](#) (Optional)
•