

CSR to Abolish Application Deadlines for Chartered Reviewers



Appointed members of all chartered CSR study sections soon may be able to submit—at any time—their R01 and R21 applications intended for the standing due dates (not special dates for RFAs and PARs). Such applications would be guaranteed a review within 90 days of receipt and would be referred to the appropriate NIH Institute Advisory Council for the next possible round. In most cases, the reviews will be conducted by Special Emphasis Panels.

Alternatively, for these chartered study section members the NIH policy allowing for a window of consideration for applications submitted for standard deadlines (<http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/funding/submissionschedule.htm>) will still be available; such applications could be assigned to other recurring study sections. All those who opt to submit according to current practice will receive their score and summary statement at least 30 days before the Council meeting. For ad hoc members, the current practice of windows of consideration would continue as well (<http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-07-026.html>).

Why Continuous Submissions? CSR wants to reward our reviewers for their many sacrifices and offer greater flexibility in submitting an application because they often must do so during the time they are reviewing and participating in study section meetings. We also hope to learn from this practice and see if it could be a good option for reviewing other types of applications or facilitating other options for improving peer review in the future.

Approval/Buy-In: The concept has been reviewed by the NIH Review Policy Committee, the NIH Extramural Program Management Committee and discussed by the NIH Peer Review Advisory Committee and the NIH Director's Advisory Committee. Review offices at the other NIH Institutes and Centers (ICs) have been invited to help develop and advance a pilot of this practice so all R01s, R03s and R21s coming from regular study section members could eventually be submitted this way across NIH. It is likely that reviews coordinated by other ICs would be conducted within 120 days after submission.

What Are the Hurdles? CSR does not anticipate a significant increase in workloads since 50% of the applications from chartered members already are reviewed in Special Emphasis Panels. The main hurdles are technical. CSR is currently working to resolve or workaround limitations to NIH/CSR assignment and notification systems.

When? CSR will continue to work on these technological issues so that a pilot can be implemented in 2008. The details of this change and a corresponding clarification of the NIH policy on late applications will be published in the NIH Guide to Grants and Contracts.

Big Step in Shortening the Review Cycle

CSR has fully implemented the practice of offering shorter review cycles to new investigator R01 applications submitted for standard submission dates and reviewed in recurring study sections. Now, any of these applicants can resubmit their applications in the next review cycle if they wish, saving four months. There is no longer a requirement that the resubmission be reviewed by the same study section that reviewed the previous version. The NIH policy limiting the number of resubmissions to two remains the same. The decision to expand this practice was based on a pilot that initially involved 40 study sections and about 2,000 new investigator applications. Approximately 13 percent of the eligible new investigators took the opportunity to resubmit for the next review cycle. The pilot was later successfully expanded to include 100 study sections.

Accelerated Release of Summary Statements: CSR began its effort to shorten review cycles in 2006, when it started posting summary statements for all new investigator applications within 10 days of the review meeting and summary statements for all other applications within 30 days of the review meeting. Before, applicants could wait up to three months to receive their summary statements. In the past year, this practice helped create a window for the submission of other applications. A hundred and twenty-five experienced R01 applicants—who otherwise would have had to wait a cycle—reapplied in the next cycle.

Our Goal: To ultimately shorten the review cycle for all applicants and give them the opportunity to submit their applications up to three times in one calendar year, rather than stretching the process over two years. Shorter review cycles will—

- Enable applicants and NIH to more quickly advance promising research.
- Allow NIH and the scientific community to keep better pace with the rapid growth of science and evolving health needs.
- Aid vulnerable but promising researchers who don't have the resources to wait for many extra months.

See the *NIH Guide* notice: <http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-07-083.html>.

CSR Raises the Profile of Its Scientific Staff



The name of our Scientific Review Administrators is being changed to better characterize their true role and their important scientific contributions to NIH peer review. They will now be called “Scientific Review Officers.” This new title is more reflective of their major focus on science rather than their administrative activities. This title also will be more on par with that of NIH Institute and Center Program Officers or Program Directors. We hope this change will improve our efforts to recruit scientific staff.

The momentum for this change came from CSR Staff: SRO Dan Gerendasy proposed the name change as a representative on a group that advises the CSR Director.

The new name was vetted by the various NIH governance committees, and it is supported by many extramural stakeholders. CSR will gradually implement this name change on our CSR Web site and other documents and materials. The NIH Institutes and Centers have expressed support for this change and will eventually implement it in their review offices.

A New Approach to Hiring Scientific Staff



CSR needs to hire about 36 SROs a year to stay fully staffed. We have had a constant need for many years due to growth, retirements and the usual staff turnover. This situation concerns us, since the success of NIH peer review depends on having SROs with a high level of scientific expertise to recruit excellent reviewers and assign complex scientific applications to the right reviewers.

An aggressive recruitment process is now underway.

We regularly post SRO job announcements on www.USAJobs.com to recruit talented SROs for our Integrated Review Groups (IRGs) in all Divisions. We also place generic ads for these Division-wide SRO positions in Science magazine and other journals. This aggressive recruitment approach not only addresses our need to fill vacant positions but it allows us to proactively hire SROs to begin their training and be ready to fill vacancies as they occur.

Encourage your friends and colleagues to explore the possibility of joining CSR's team of SROs by visiting our Web site: <http://cms.csr.nih.gov/AboutCSR/Employment/>.

New National Registry for Society-Recommended Reviewers

CSR is developing a new registry of experienced senior scientists who would make good reviewers based on recommendations from scientific societies and institutions. We hope this registry will be a key tool for Scientific Review Officers to (1) more quickly identify experienced, volunteer reviewers and (2) provide societies and institutions with additional input into the peer review process.

CSR is looking for potential reviewers who—

- Have substantial and broad independent research experience
- Have received major peer-reviewed grants either from NIH or an equivalent agency
- Understand the review process
- Are willing to consider serving for four years as study section members

In the coming months, we will ask societies, scientific groups and academic institutions to help us identify qualified volunteers by recommending experts in the field who indicate a willingness to serve.

Society representatives interested in participating are asked to contact CSR by sending an e-mail to RecruitReviewers@csr.nih.gov. CSR will provide the appropriate form for the societies to distribute to their members to complete. Individuals interested in serving as reviewers or learning more about how reviewers are selected should consult CSR's Web site for instructions on how to do this: <http://cms.csr.nih.gov/PeerReviewMeetings/StudySectionReviewers>.

Advances in Shortening the Grant Application

CSR is working with a number of NIH Institutes to pilot shorter grant applications. About seven pilots are being pursued which would assess applications that limit the research plan to 7, 10 or 15 pages. A single questionnaire will be used to assess the different pilots. These new efforts

have grown out of the trans-NIH Application Committee. They also have been supported by a strong majority (3:1) of respondents to an NIH Request for Information issued last year. This overall initiative will likely be guided by additional input gathered from the trans-NIH effort currently underway to seek stakeholder input on the NIH grant and peer review system. (See related article on page 5.) More information: <http://cms.csr.nih.gov/AboutCSR/CSRInitiatives.htm>.

New Neuroscience Integrated Review Group

Following recommendations from stakeholders, CSR developed plans to create a fourth neuroscience IRG: “Emerging Technologies and Training in Neurosciences (ETTN)” IRG. The NIH Peer Review Advisory Committee unanimously endorsed these plans at its August 27, 2007 meeting. The IRG will make a home for 2 new study sections focused on molecular neurogenetics and neurotechnology as well as 10 Special Emphasis Panels to review fellowship and small business grant applications. No current study section will be altered. More information is available in the News section of CSR’s homepage: <http://www.csr.nih.gov>.

CSR Adds a Fifth Review Division

CSR has created a new review division: the Division of Neuroscience, Development and Aging, which will cluster all four neuroscience Integrated Review Groups (IRGs)—which were previously dispersed across three Divisions—under one roof along with the Biology of Development IRG.

The main driver for this realignment is the science. Grouping these IRGs together will enhance interactions between their SROs; encourage shared recruitment of new SROs and reviewers; provide for more efficiency in spreading workloads across similar-science IRGs; and facilitate interaction with NIH Institutes and Centers, professional societies and stakeholders that have more shared scientific interests. No study sections will be changed in this realignment; rather, the association between study sections will simply be enhanced by grouping the IRGs into a more science-defined division.

The creation of this new division culminates months of discussions with members of the NIH Peer Review Advisory Committee, NIH Institute and Center directors, CSR division directors, and many other stakeholders. CSR appreciates the community’s interest and involvement in suggesting such efforts to improve NIH peer review.

Update on CSR Open Houses



Leaders from the scientific community and other stakeholders have participated in four of six CSR Open Houses this year. The first two meetings focused on neuroscience and behavioral and social sciences research, and the following two meetings focused on disease-based and integrated biology research.

Key Questions: Participants discussed the alignment of CSR study sections and ongoing CSR initiatives to invigorate NIH peer review. Breakout groups for the different research areas addressed two key questions: What will be the most important questions and/or enabling technologies you see forthcoming with the science of your discipline in the next 10 years? Is the science of your discipline, in its present state, appropriately evaluated?

Some common themes have emerged: There is a need for NIH to better adapt its review system for reviewing multidisciplinary applications and translational research. There also is an emerging need for greater expertise across disciplines for assessing proposals that involve data management and analysis of large data sets and the dissemination of data that integrate biological and behavioral data collection efforts. Full reports of these meetings are being posted on CSR's Web site.

The next open house workshop will be held on November 9, 2007, integrated biological review groups not considered at the last open house. The final workshop focusing on the biomolecular review groups will be held on December 18, 2007. Information on all the Open House Workshops is available on the Open House Workshop Web page: <http://cms.csr.nih.gov/AboutCSR/Openhouses.htm>.

Insider's Guide for New Reviewers and Study Section Chairs

Being a new reviewer or study section chair can be intimidating. To help, we asked five current and retired study section chairs for their advice. They graciously shared their insights, which we've organized into an Insider Guides to Peer Review for New Reviewers and Study Section Chairs. It's posted on our Web site under our Peer Review Meetings page:

<http://cms.csr.nih.gov/PeerReviewMeetings/>

What's Next? An Insider's Guide to NIH Peer Review for Applicants. We will welcome any advice you have to share. We will post it with the Jan. 2008 issue of the *Peer Review Notes*. Also, please let us know if you have additional advice you would like to share with new reviewers or study section chairs. Send your advice to PRN@csr.nih.gov. Thank you!

Trans-NIH Effort Advances to Enhance Peer Review



On June 8, 2007, NIH Director, Dr. Elias Zerhouni, called leaders from across the scientific community and NIH to join a trans-NIH effort to examine the NIH peer review system and help make it more effective and efficient for both applicants and reviewers. Focus will be given, not only to the initial peer review for scientific merit, but also to the subsequent decision-making processes, and NIH portfolio management. This input will be key to improving NIH's ability to adjust to rapid changes in science and meet the growing public health challenges.

New external and internal groups formed

- The Advisory Council to the Director Working Group on Peer Review—cochaired by Dr. Keith Yamamoto, Executive Vice Dean, UCSF Medical School; and Dr. Larry Tabak, Director, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research.
- The NIH Steering Committee Working Group on Peer Review—cochaired by Dr. Tabak and Dr. Jeremy Berg, Director of the National Institute of General Medical Sciences.

Many activities have been conducted and scheduled to gather input from the scientific community, NIH staff and other stakeholders. These activities include an external Request for Information and a NIH staff survey as well as meetings with leaders of the scientific community and other stakeholders in Bethesda and across the country.

Some emerging themes

- Review of the project vs. the person
- Length of support needed for success
- Different types of reviews at different career levels
- More appropriate feedback to applicants, such as pre-applications
- Two or more scores that could provide more information
- Impact of application streamlining on new investigators

More information on this initiative, its ongoing activities and emerging themes is available on a special Web site: <http://enhancing-peer-review.nih.gov>.

CSR is conducting parallel initiatives: These efforts will help inform and advance the trans-NIH initiative. After the diagnostic phase is complete, the resulting reports, which will include the breadth of ideas gathered, will be given to NIH leadership to determine next steps, including piloting and evaluating the best proposals for enhancing NIH peer review. Read about CSR's Initiatives online: <http://cms.csr.nih.gov/AboutCSR/CSRInitatives.htm>.

Two-Stage Reviews

"CSR needs to improve reviews of translational, complex and multidisciplinary research." We've heard this said many times by Open House participants, advisory committee members and others. To respond, NIH will pilot two-stage reviews similar to editorial board reviews at scientific journals. In the first stage, many reviewers would individually assess the specific scientific aspects of an application and submit their assessments. In the second stage, a face-to-face panel of experienced reviewers with broad perspective would meet to globally examine the application for its impact and significance, in the light of the first review. Such a two-stage review would allow a more thorough assessment of individual scientific and technological components as well as the overall impact and significance of an application.

A small number of reviews to date have incorporated aspects of this approach. NIH is planning to develop full pilots with thorough evaluations. For more information, view the PowerPoint slides that were shown to our advisory council on August 27, 2007: <http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/peer/prac/index.htm>.

Extraordinary Reviewer Inspires Annual Reviewer Award



There are many stars in the universe of NIH peer review. Over 31,000 scientists from across the country and globe cast revealing light on the 80,000 grant applications NIH receives every year. Untold sacrifices are made by these researchers so we can find the best applications and ultimately treat/cure and prevent disease. One bright star recently moved many at NIH by her heroic commitment: Dr. Marcy Speer continued to review grants during treatment for breast cancer, and she extended her term as a regular member of CSR's Genetics of Health and Disease Study Section to make up for meetings she

missed during chemotherapy. Go to our Reviewer Stories Web page to read more of our memorial tribute to Marcy: <http://cms.csr.nih.gov/AboutCSR/CSRReviewerStories/>.

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