

# PEER REVIEW NOTES

## May 2006

### CSR Moves Forward on Many Fronts

**Recruiting the Best Reviewers:** The need to recruit more reviewers in certain fields has led us to pilot new review modes—telephone, Internet video, and asynchronous electronic discussions—and hybrids of these modes, which may reduce the time and inconveniences associated with in-town meetings. Our pilots are having such success and acceptance that we can commit to using these technologies for 10 percent of our reviews to fill the demand in certain areas. Face-to-face reviews still remain the standard, but to engage the same needed reviewers, we must use alternative review platforms. Since our reviews are only as good as our reviewers, we will seek the best platform for recruiting the best reviewers.

**Keeping Study Sections Current:** All Integrated Review Groups (IRGs) are scheduled to be formally reviewed every 5 years, but we need to do more, given the pace of changes in science and at NIH/CSR. We thus expanded our efforts to evaluate study section review responsibilities, organization and function. Every IRG and its study sections now will be evaluated by senior CSR staff every 2 years, and each month we devote a half a day to assessing an IRG. When a local problem occurs, such as a workload imbalance, we convene ad hoc working groups that include senior members of the extramural community and program staff. Small problems are resolved internally and larger ones are raised to the NIH Peer Review Advisory Committee. CSR also incorporates input gathered informally as described below.

**Seeking Input for Improvements:** CSR Director, Toni Scarpa, continues to seek feedback and new ideas for improving our reviews. Each month, he attends about 30 review meetings and makes five presentations at different scientific meetings. He recently made a commitment to talk with all retiring study section chairs to thank them for their service and seek their insights for improving NIH peer review. Dr. Scarpa welcomes invitations to speak at different society meetings and encourages anyone with comments or suggestions to contact him via e-mail ([scarpat@csr.nih.gov](mailto:scarpat@csr.nih.gov)) or phone (301-435-1114).

**Read some of the exchanges on our Web site:** <http://cms.csr.nih.gov/NewsandReports/CSRDirectorDiscussesReforms.htm>

**Recruiting a New CSR Management Team:** After an intense search, we filled two critical positions. Our new Deputy Director is Dr. Cheryl Kitt, the former Associate Director for Extramural Research at the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases. And our new Director of Planning, Analysis and Evaluation, is Dr. Cheryl Oros, who was recently Chief of the Office of Analysis of USDA's Food and Nutrition Service. For more, visit our new Meet CSR Staff Web page: <http://cms.csr.nih.gov/AboutCSR/MeetCSRStaff.htm>.

#### CSR Really Opens Up



Dr. Scarpa and his staff just moved into an innovative office space—an open space for sharing ideas that allowed us to save money by doing away with walls and doors. More at [http://www.nih.gov/nihrecord/05\\_19\\_2006/story04.htm](http://www.nih.gov/nihrecord/05_19_2006/story04.htm)

### Electronic Applications: The Times They Are A'Changing

**The electronic submission process continues to grow at NIH, and many study sections will review electronic submissions in June and July.** During the winter and spring, over 2,641 electronic applications were successfully submitted—with some small but fixable glitches—and assigned for Academic Research Enhancement Awards (R15), small business and conference grants, and dissertation awards, as well as shared instrumentation grants and other programs. The second round of the small business and conference



grant application submissions went more smoothly, with NIH processing submissions much faster than it did in December. Problems that arose at the Grants.gov level are being addressed. To improve the process, we look forward to feedback from those involved in reviews coordinated by CSR and the NIH institutes and centers.

***CSR expects to receive at least 6,000 more electronic applications in the coming months*** as we start accepting electronic applications for Small grants (R03), Exploratory/Developmental grants (R21, R33, R21/R33), and Clinical Trial Planning grants (R34). NIH will begin accepting electronic applications for R18, R25, and C06 grants for the October 1, 2006 submission date. February 2007 will be the transition date for R01s, although a pilot multi-PI solicitation using the R01 mechanism will require electronic submission for September 2006. We expect to receive over 10,000 applications for the entire round. Investigators and their organizations should prepare early for electronic submission. View the transition timeline and get additional information on this important effort at the revitalized electronic submission Web site: <http://era.nih.gov/ElectronicReceipt>.

***Organizations and Principal Investigators no longer are required to verify each electronic application.*** As of May 10, 2006, an electronically submitted application will be automatically forwarded to the CSR Division of Receipt and Referral after two business days if the application is not otherwise “rejected” by the Signing Official due to some problems in the transmission process. Organizations and Principal Investigators are strongly encouraged to view their application in the Commons during these two business days to be sure that all of the correct versions of pdfs were attached and no other problems exist. To seek changes/additions after the two-day period, applicants must contact the Scientific Review Administrator. For more details, go to <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-06-055.html>.

***Changes in Electronic and Paper Submission Processes have been posted in the NIH Guide to Grants and Contracts:*** <http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-06-056.html> and take effect May 10, 2006. NIH made these changes to facilitate a smoother and fair transition from paper to electronic applications and to improve the overall process:

- Principal investigators no longer need to sign/verify grant paper or electronic applications, progress reports or prior approval requests. Their institutions instead will maintain a unique signature and date for each submitted application as a compliance requirement.
- Applicants should provide urls for publicly available articles in appendix materials.
- NIH made a number of changes related to multiple Principal Investigators, including requiring the eRA Commons User Name for PIs on the application.
- Applicants should—when appropriate—address Select Agent Research in specified sections of the paper PHS 398 and the electronic SF 424 (R&R)

**For Breaking News on Electronic Applications**

**OER Electronic Submission Web Page:**  
<http://era.nih.gov/ElectronicReceipt>

**NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts:**  
<http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/guide/index.html>

**NIH Office of Extramural Research Grants Page:** <http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/oer.htm>

**News from CSR:** <http://www.csr.nih.gov>

Specific changes made to the PHS 398 and to the PHS 2590 paper applications to achieve comparability to the SF424 (R&R) application include—

- Effort devoted to projects is to be requested as person months
- Page limits for each subsection of the Biographical Sketch have been eliminated, but the entire Biographical Sketch section is still limited to four pages.

*We will no longer send paper notifications of assignment* effective June 1, 2006: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-06-066.html>. Applicants will need to use the eRA Commons to get this information.

## Multiple Principal Investigators



In February 2006, NIH announced it would begin implementing a government-wide policy to allow the formal recognition of more than one Principal Investigator on research grant applications and awards. The announcement was made following an analysis of responses to an NIH request for information issued in July 2005; the Office of Science and Technology Policy also issued a request for information.

The Multiple Principal Investigator approach is an option well suited to “team science” and is intended to supplement—not replace—the traditional, single Principal Investigator model. The implementation of the Multiple Principal Investigator model will accommodate (1) multiple investigators at a single institution, (2) multiple institutions, and (3) different budget arrangements. It will require changes/adjustments in a wide range of NIH policies and practices (submission, review, grants management, progress monitoring). NIH will initially make it available only for specified Funding Opportunity Announcements, generally Requests for Applications (RFAs), so we can refine the approaches and provide better instructions to applicants, reviewers and staff. We expect the Multiple Principal Investigator option will be widely available sometime in 2007. For more information, go to the Multiple PI Web site developed by the Office of Extramural Research: [http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/multi\\_pi/index.htm](http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/multi_pi/index.htm)

## Pre-Meeting Telephone Streamlining: A Pilot With Promise

The orientation and streamlining discussions held at the beginning of study section consume valuable time and can significantly alter the review schedule. Member conflicts or other problems sometimes arise, and members have to scramble with unexpected reassignments. Last minute changes to the review agenda also can cause program staff members to scramble or miss reviews because they often must attend multiple review meetings on the same day. To make meetings more efficient for everyone, CSR initiated a pilot of pre-meeting telephone conference calls for orientation and for streamlining of lower half applications before the actual, face-to-face meeting.

In the last review cycle, four study sections held pre-meeting telephone conferences during the time between the posting of reviews into the Internet-Assisted Review system and the review meeting: Electrical Signaling, Ion Transport and Arrhythmias; Gastrointestinal Mucosal Pathobiology; Gene and Drug Delivery Systems; and BST-Z small business. Reviewer participation was extremely good, about 85%. (Those not in conferences were contacted individually.)

Both program staff members and reviewers found the process worthwhile and both groups asked that their study sections continue the pilot the next cycle. Two more study sections will join the pilot: Xenobiotic and Nutrient Disposition and Action; and Cancer Molecular Pathobiology. We will continue to assess the effects of these teleconferences on reviewers’ time, on review quality, and reviewer and program staff attendance.

### Potential Advantages of Telephone Streamlining

- Face-to-face meetings will be more focused and efficient, saving members time.
- Additional reviewers can be recruited if preliminary scores are discrepant or if there are additional conflicts.
- Some reviewers may be able to forgo traveling to the meeting and participate via phone if most of their assignments are streamlined.
- Some 2-day review meetings could become 1-day meetings.
- The review schedule will be more definite, so program officers can better schedule their attendance.

## NIH At the Crossroads: NIH Director Speaks

Dr. Elias Zerhouni addressed our Peer Review Advisory Committee May 22, 2006. You can view his slides at <http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/peer/prac>. Select the presentation entitled “NIH at the Crossroads: Myths, Realities and Strategies for the Future.”

He also has given many speeches on Capitol Hill and across the country to tell the American people what NIH does for them. In speaking to the Senate Subcommittee on Appropriations recently, he said, “The estimated total cumulative investment at the NIH per American over the past 30 years including the doubling period is about \$1,334 or about \$44 per American per year over the entire period. In return, Americans have gained over six years of life expectancy and are aging healthier than ever before.” He continued, “NIH research is often the only hope for millions of people afflicted by disease. In the battle for health, NIH also believes that it needs to accelerate the pace of progress, as it is only through a fundamental transformation of medicine that solutions to the rising burden of healthcare will be found.” To view his slides, go to <http://www.nih.gov/about/director/budgetrequest/fy2007senateslides.pdf>.

## NIH Pilot to Shorten the Review Cycle

“It takes too long to get an NIH grant”—applicants, advocacy groups, and members of Congress often tell us. A big factor is that applicants for the most popular NIH grant (R01) who need to revise must sit out a review cycle to amend their applications. Such delays are out of step with the pace of science and endanger careers, particularly those of new investigators. With the support of NIH Director, Elias Zerhouni, and members of a trans-NIH committee, CSR initiated a pilot with the ultimate goal of giving those who need to revise the opportunity to do so for the very next cycle. This pilot is focused on new investigators and is being conducted in 40 study sections reviewing 587 new investigator R01 applications. Any of these new investigators who needs to may resubmit at a special date (July 20) rather than wait until November. We expect about 150 new investigators will decide to resubmit for the early submission date. They should, however, consider this option carefully. They only will have about one month to revise, and we do not recommend that investigators who need to make substantial revisions take this option. We will thus advise them to discuss their situations with NIH program staff and their mentors and to weigh options carefully.

A trans-NIH group is developing a plan for assessing the pilot. If results are favorable and if efficiencies come from receiving applications electronically, NIH will consider expanding the pilot to include all new investigators who need to revise their applications. Eventually, NIH may offer this opportunity to all R01 applicants. For more information, go to <http://cms.csr.nih.gov/NewsandReports/ShortCycle.htm>.

## New Travel Arrangements

In response to many of your suggestions, World Travel Services (WTS) now will provide non-refundable tickets at market rates instead of the sometimes more expensive Government rates in a plan that offers both flexibility and cost savings. WTS will still seek to provide reviewers with as much flexibility as possible, but a few things should be kept in mind when making travel arrangements: (1) reviewers are encouraged to make reservations and purchases as soon as possible to get discounts offered; (2) WTS will allow one change in reservations per round-trip; and (3) a non-refundable ticket often may not be transferred to a different airline.

### There Had to Be A Better Way



A publication of the Center for Scientific Review  
National Institutes of Health  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services