![center for scientific review] **peer review notes**
january 2008

New Year Brings New Things

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CSR Study Sections Go West!

West Coast reviewers often say it's a big burden to travel all the way to DC three times a year, and many other reviewers say they would enjoy going to other places sometimes.
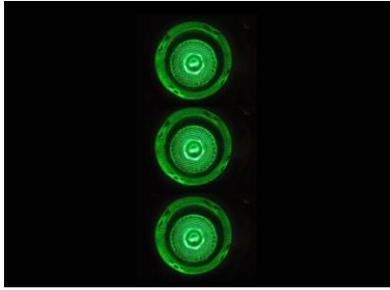
CSR Responds: We analyzed the situation and quickly learned it does not cost more to host reviews in some other cities. We now ask Scientific Review Officers (SROs) who regularly hold meetings in the DC area to convene one out-of-town meeting a year. Fifty percent of them are expected to do it this year, and all of them in 2009.

Approved Metropolitan Areas: Chicago, Seattle, Los Angeles or San Francisco. These areas were selected because of the number of current reviewers there, the availability of direct flights and the cost. SROs may seek approval to use other major west coast cities.

Benefits: We hope out-of-town meetings will help us recruit and retain reviewers by decreasing travel burdens of many and making the review experience more enjoyable for others. Such meetings also give CSR greater scheduling flexibility because it increases the number of meeting venues available.

NIH Gives Chartered Reviewers New Flexibility Submitting Applications

Green Light for Continuous Submission: NIH has just increased the incentives for scientists to serve as chartered or "permanent" members on its peer review groups so it can improve

reviewer recruitment to better identify the most promising research for funding. These researchers, who typically serve four years reviewing NIH grant applications, now have more flexibility in submitting their own grant applications.

A recent NIH Guide Notice explains a new policy that gives these reviewers the option to submit—as soon as they are developed—R01, R21 or R34 applications that would normally be submitted for standard submission dates. Chartered members are strongly encouraged to add a cover letter to their applications requesting this option.
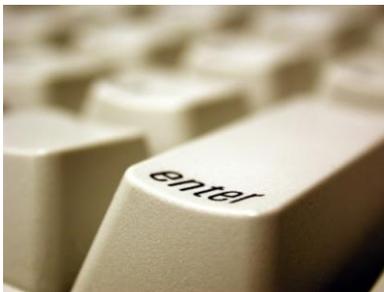
This new policy was developed to help chartered reviewers, who can be disadvantaged by deadlines that force them to develop their own applications while reviewing those submitted to NIH by others.

These reviewers may still request a review by a standing study section other than their own. In this case, they must submit their applications in accord with established deadlines. The current "windows" for reviewers to submit many of these applications late will remain available. These "windows" will also remain available for temporary reviewers and those serving on Special Emphasis Panels.

Continuous submission will be carefully evaluated to see whether eligibility should be extended. View the NIH Guide Notice at **http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-08-026.html**.

Online Review System Improved

New software will help CSR improve its secure, Web-based "message-board" review meetings. We hold these "asynchronous electronic discussion" (AED) meetings when study sections prefer them or when they enable us to recruit critical reviewers who cannot attend regular study section meetings.

Improvements in the new AED software used this round include—

- Improved speed resulting from substantive changes to the underlying software code and significant hardware upgrades.
- A completely redesigned interface with improved navigation and operation for both reviewers and NIH staff.
- Use of eCommons as the method for authenticating users on the AED server. Reviewers will no longer be required to obtain separate usernames and passwords.

Benefits: The main reason for convening an AED meeting is to engage the best possible reviewers. In some research disciplines, such as surgical and interventional medicine, it is often difficult or impossible for reviewers to attend face-to-face meetings. AED meetings may also—

- Provide greater flexibility for scheduling and running peer-review meetings at NIH.
- Enhance the dynamics of discussion at the meeting. Separating reviewers across time and space may allow for a more thoughtful and thorough discussion, and different reviewer personalities are enabled in this less confrontational environment.

- Simplify the management of conflicts during the meeting.
- Facilitate the recruitment of reviewers from overseas.

Building on a Solid Base: Since September 2006, we have hosted over 200 of these online meetings involving about 2,900 applications and 2,600 reviewers. Feedback from reviewers has been very positive. A survey of those who used AED between June and Dec 2006 showed that large majorities were satisfied with AED technology and felt sufficiently well-informed to make rigorous and fair evaluations. A new survey has been developed, and it will be distributed to participants beginning February 1.

The Future: Expanded use within CSR will be driven by the need. Some NIH Institutes and Centers are using AED, and CSR will work to accommodate their requests and reach out to additional Institutes and Centers. More information on AED is available via the CSR Initiatives Web page: **http://cms.csr.nih.gov/AboutCSR/CSRInitiatives/**.

CSR Seeks to Honor Outstanding Reviewers

Do you know a reviewer who has been outstanding in his or her service on a CSR study section? Let us know! We're seeking nominations for the 2008 Marcy Speer Award, which was developed last year to honor Dr. Marcy Speer for her unwavering support for NIH peer review.

You can nominate a current or former reviewer who excelled in serving NIH, the scientific community and humanity in one or more of the following ways:

- ***Going above and beyond the call of duty*** to ensure that NIH grant applications receive fair and expert reviews.
- ***Having a significant impact on the quality*** of the peer review process through an abiding commitment to peer review.
- ***Educating and inspiring colleagues in the scientific community*** to do their part in serving on CSR review groups.
- ***Greatly enhancing peer review*** by setting an example of excellence, inspiring fellow reviewers, or nurturing new reviewers.

Who Can Nominate? Anyone from the scientific or review communities as well as CSR and NIH staff.

How to Nominate Someone: Complete the one-page nomination form and submit it to CSR by April 16, 2008. To get additional information on this award program and the nomination form, go to **http://cms.csr.nih.gov/AboutCSR/SpeerAward.htm**.

A Year of Listening to Improve CSR Review Groups

CSR just completed a yearlong effort to gather input on our review groups. Nearly 1,000 leaders from the scientific community and other stakeholders participated in six Open Houses that focused on our different review groups. Participants were asked to tell us how well they are aligned to the science and to tell us the emerging issues and technologies in the specific fields so we can prepare our review groups for the future.

Key Themes: Participants reported that most study sections are properly aligned. However, many participants noted how the sciences are merging, and said it was critical for NIH to enhance how its review system handles multidisciplinary applications and translational research. Other challenges were noted in the review of computational-experimental applications, and those that focus on the development of tools and technologies rather than specific biological questions.
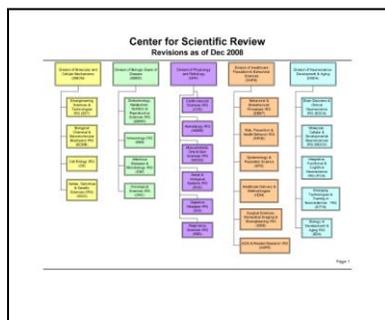
Participants also made more global suggestions on how to improve the peer review process. For example, NIH was encouraged to—

- Use a two-stage review, first an editorial board with technical expertise, then a broader panel to assess significance.
- Create a floating pool of ad hoc members to review interdisciplinary applications.
- Conduct several review meetings at the same time and place so study sections can share reviewers.
- Ensure study sections include members with both theoretical and experimental expertise.
- Assign particularly complex applications to more than three reviewers.
- Provide greater clarity and transparency on how applications are assigned to specific study sections.
- Limit reviewer workload to ten applications, even with shorter applications.

Future Efforts: In 2007, CSR also completed a complementary two-year internal effort to assess and realign its Integrated Review Groups (IRGs) and their study sections. In the spring of 2008, CSR will begin a new effort to review each IRG. Study section chairs, eminent scientists, and others from the scientific community will be invited to participate with CSR/NIH staff in these new reviews so we can gather their input on emerging trends in the science and how CSR study sections should be aligned to manage growth areas. This initiative also will facilitate additional scientific interactions between CSR staff and outside experts and provide an opportunity for reviewer training.

Get More Information Online at **http://www.csr.nih.gov/openhouse/**. A final report will be posted there soon.

Review Group Realignment Continues with Rollout of New Division of Healthcare, Population and Behavioral Sciences

CSR has realigned review in the areas of Behavioral, Social and Population Sciences and AIDS research by replacing the current Division of Clinical and Population-based Studies with the new Division of Healthcare, Population and Behavioral Sciences.

The current Health of the Population (HOP) Integrated Review Group (IRG) will be split into two IRGs: Epidemiological and Population Sciences, and Healthcare Delivery and Methodologies. This was done to decrease the overwhelming size of the HOP IRG to the ideal range of 8-12 SROs.

Five IRGs in the New Division
- Biobehavioral and Behavioral Processes
- Risk, Prevention and Health Behavior

- AIDS and Related Research
- Epidemiological and Population Sciences
- Healthcare Delivery and Methodologies

The main driver for this realignment is the science. Grouping these IRGs together will enhance interactions between their SROs 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 around common scientific themes. The creation of this new division follows discussions with members of the NIH Peer Review Advisory Committee, Open House participants, NIH Institute and Center directors, CSR division directors, and many other stakeholders. Comments from the Peer Review Advisory Committee focused on the location of cross-cutting review of AIDS research and the transfer of Health Informatics into Healthcare Delivery and Methodologies. CSR appreciates the community's interest and involvement in suggesting such efforts to improve NIH peer review.

More Societies Urged to Help Recruit Reviewers

Many scientific societies responded to our call last September to send us information on highly qualified volunteers to serve on our review groups. SROs are now using our national registry for society-recommended reviewers to recruit reviewers.

More societies are invited to contact CSR at **RecruitReviewers@csr.nih.gov** to find out how they can help ensure their scientific areas are adequately covered by excellent reviewers. We will provide an Excel spreadsheet to make it easy to submit names and other needed information.

If your society hasn't participated, please encourage it to do its part.

Individuals interested in volunteering are urged to contact their respective scientific society and ask to be considered for inclusion in the list it sends to us.

CSR is looking for individuals who—

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

Trans-NIH Effort to Enhance Peer Review Update

First Phase Completed: The diagnostic phase of the Trans-NIH effort to assess and enhance the ways NIH funds biomedical and behavioral research and reviews grant applications is now complete. Dr. Zerhouni charged this initiative on June 8, 2007, and during the summer and fall of 2007, NIH surveyed stakeholders—the extramural community, advocacy groups, professional society groups, and NIH staff—to collect input and ideas for enhancements to the NIH peer review and grants systems. This process included an online Request for Information; an internal NIH survey; an interactive Web site for liaisons; the collection of data from previous and existing

NIH peer review experiments and practices; direct communications and correspondence with stakeholders, a series of internal and external consultation meetings; and regional meetings across the nation.

The diagnostic phase focused on the following:
- Challenges (and solutions) for the NIH system of research support
- Challenges (and solutions) for the NIH peer review process
- Core values of the NIH peer review process
- Peer review criteria and scoring
- Peer review at different career stages
- Role of advisory councils in the second level of review

Two internal and external working groups met independently several times during the diagnostic phase. On December 7, 2007, the external group presented its findings to the Advisory Committee to the NIH Director. The internal group presented its findings to the NIH Steering Committee and NIH Institute and Center Directors. The two working groups are incorporating recent input and working together to finalize recommendations on the major challenges and potential actions.

Formal recommendations will be made to NIH leadership in February 2008. For more information, please visit the following Web site: **http://enhancing-peer-review.nih.gov/**.

Study Section Chairs Share Insights for Applicants

When reviewing applications, you often wish you could have grabbed the applicants before they submitted and told them what they needed to know about writing a grant. The quality of science proposed would increase, and you would be better able to evaluate it. Of course, having such contact with an applicant would violate conflict-of-interest laws. CSR however has done what we think is the next best thing.

We asked a group of current and retired study section chairs to give us their advice for applicants. The group responded with great enthusiasm, hitting many of the same notes.

Insider's Guide to Peer Review Now Online: We consolidated their comments and produced "The Insider's Guide to Peer Review for Applicants," which is now on our Web site: **http://cms.csr.nih.gov/ResourcesforApplicants/Advice.htm**. CSR also will use this guide as a handout in our outreach efforts.

Other Useful CSR Handouts for New Applicants can be downloaded from our Web site: **http://cms.csr.nih.gov/aboutcsr/publications/**.

- What Happens to Your Grant Application
- NIH Grant Application Submission and Review – Useful Web Links

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