

PEER REVIEW NOTES

May 2003

CSR Is Reviewing Record Numbers of Applications

Over the 5-year period when the NIH budget was doubled, there has been a growing increase in the number of applications received and reviewed by the Center for Scientific Review (CSR). For the first two cycles of the current fiscal year, CSR will have received and reviewed more applications than were received and reviewed during all three cycles of fiscal year 1998, the year the doubling began. The overall number of applications received by CSR so far this calendar year is up over 20 percent compared to the same time last year. In the current review cycle, CSR will review over 16,000 applications—a remarkable 35 percent increase compared to the number of applications reviewed in the same round last year.

For fiscal year 2004, the President has proposed \$27.9 billion for NIH. In this budget, NIH would receive a very minor increase over what it received in fiscal year 2003, but overall NIH research support would be increased by 7.5 percent or over \$1.9 billion. Even subtracting out the Administration's highest priority—homeland defense—research components of the NIH budget would still increase by 4.3 percent. For more information about the President's proposed 2004 NIH budget, you may download a summary at <http://www.nih.gov/news/budgetfy2004/fy2004presidentsbudget.pdf>. You will need the free [Adobe Acrobat Reader](#) software to view this file.

Study Section Reorganization Update

Study Section Design Phase Complete

Between February 2001 and April 2003, CSR convened 16 Study Section Boundaries (SSB) Team meetings to design study sections for Integrated Review Groups (IRGs) proposed by the Panel on Scientific Boundaries for Review. The final two SSB Teams met to design study sections for the Biological Chemistry and Macromolecular Biophysics IRG and the Cell Biology IRG. These meetings took place February 26 - 28, 2003, and April 2-4, 2003, respectively. Proposed guidelines for the Biological Chemistry and Macromolecular Biophysics IRG will be available for comment until June 30, 2003, and guidelines for the Cell Biology IRG will be available for comment until July 31, 2003. You may review study section guidelines developed by the SSB Teams and enter comments on guidelines that remain open for comment by visiting the CSR Reorganization Activities Page (<http://www.csr.nih.gov/review/reorgact.asp>).

Nearly 500 scientists have participated in the SSB Team meetings, and over 1,600 researchers have submitted comments via our Web site. Additional researchers have sent letters and e-mails, and many participated in over 50 meetings where CSR staff members presented the proposed guidelines. CSR is very grateful for all the efforts of the scientific community and appreciates the valuable input received.

Study Section Implementation Activities

CSR began implementing IRGs designed by SSB Teams that met early in the study section design phase. In the May and September 2002 meetings, the CSR Advisory Committee recommended guidelines and implementation plans for the Hematology (HEM), Biology of Development and Aging (BDA), Musculoskeletal, Oral and Skin Sciences (MOSS), and Oncological Sciences (ONC) IRGs to the CSR Director. The first meetings of the HEM study sections will occur in June 2003. The first

Please send your comments to PRN@csr.nih.gov

meetings of study sections in the new BDA IRG will occur in October 2003. The first meetings of study sections within the MOSS IRG (formerly Musculoskeletal and Dental Sciences) and the reorganized ONC IRG (consisting of 13 study sections) will also take place in October 2003.

In January 2003 and May 2003, at the recommendation of the CSR Advisory Committee, CSR's Director approved modified guidelines and implementation plans for the following IRGs: Cardiovascular Sciences; Digestive Sciences; Bioengineering Sciences and Technologies; Respiratory Sciences; Renal and Urological Sciences; Surgical Sciences, Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering; Immunology; and Endocrinology, Metabolism, Nutrition and Reproductive Sciences. Study sections for these IRGs and also Renal and Urological Sciences and Respiratory Sciences IRGs are expected to meet for the first time starting in February 2004.

For the most recent information on our implementation activities, please visit <http://www.csr.nih.gov/events/timeline.htm>.

NIH Data Sharing Policy

Starting with the October 1, 2003 receipt date, investigators submitting an NIH application seeking \$500,000 or more in direct costs for any single year will be required to include a plan for data sharing or to state why data sharing is not possible. Data sharing must be addressed in the significance and budget sections of these applications, and a description of the data-sharing plan (or an explanation for its absence) must appear at the end of the research plan.

According to the stated policy, reviewers will not factor the proposed data-sharing plan into the determination of scientific merit or priority scores, although in certain situations the data-sharing plan may be integral to the significance of the project or to safeguards for ensuring confidentiality and protecting the identity of human subjects. Institute program staff will be responsible for overseeing the data sharing policy and assessing the appropriateness and adequacy of the proposed data-sharing plan.

The Final NIH Statement on Sharing Research Data was issued as notice NOT-OD-03-032 in the NIH Guide to Grants and Contracts. You can review this notice at <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-03-032.html>.

Competitive Sourcing (A-76)

The competitive sourcing initiative known as the A-76 initiative is a Government-wide program to identify functions within the Federal Government that are not "inherently governmental" and to have private-sector companies compete to provide the needed services. NIH is currently seeking bids for supplying support services, including those provided by CSR's Grants Technical Assistants.

There has been some concern that work performed by Scientific Review Administrators (SRAs) may be considered for competitive sourcing (see *Science* 2003 21 Mar; 299:1823). NIH maintains that the SRA position is inherently governmental. At this time, there is no plan to study the SRA position for competitive sourcing. However, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) makes the final determination on the positions that will be considered for competitive sourcing. To date, we have no reason to believe that OMB will not concur with the NIH position, which is shared by Dr. Karen Matthews, former Chair of CSR's Advisory Committee, who stated in the article cited above that "It would be nearly impossible" to have contractors do the work SRAs do for NIH.

To learn more about competitive sourcing visit <http://governmentexecutive.com/outsourcing>.

Please send your comments to PRN@csr.nih.gov