

Update on Peer Review Changes Since the Video Was Produced

NIH and CSR introduced many new policies and initiatives since we produced the “Inside the NIH Grants Process” video. While the main points on preparing your application remain valid, it is important to note the new and planned changes to the application submission and review processes. Many of these changes are the result of a trans-NIH initiative launched in 2008 to [enhance NIH peer review](#).

Application Submission Changes

Submitting Applications Electronically: Most applicants submit grant applications electronically using the SF424 R&R form through [grants.gov](#). After submitting your application, you must check for any errors/warnings and view the assembled application in eRA Commons. You have a two-day window to correct errors. Get more information from NIH’s Electronic Submission of Grant Applications [Web site](#).

Supplemental Material and Corrections: You can now only send a limited number and type of supplemental and corrected pages to your assigned Scientific Review Administrator — now called Scientific Review Officer (SRO). Once the SRO accepts these pages, they will be uploaded as an addendum in the “Additions for Review” section of your electronic grant application folder. You can get the details in NIH’s [policy](#) for submission of supplemental grant material.

Resubmission (Amended) Applications: To fund high-quality applications sooner, beginning with the January/February/March 2009 submission dates, NIH is phasing in a [new policy](#) of only allowing applicants to submit an application twice – the original and a single resubmission/ (amended) application. Under the old policy, applicants could submit an application up to three times. If you do not receive funding after two submissions, you will need to significantly re-design the project rather than simply change the application in response to previous reviews.

Shorter Applications: Starting in January 2010, applicants will use shorter applications. The following Web sites will publish advance notice of this and other changes: the *NIH Guide*, [Enhancing NIH Peer Review](#), [NIH Grants Information](#), [OER Peer Review](#), and the [CSR](#) Web sites.

Special Receipt Dates: NIH has set special [receipt dates](#) for new investigator R01 resubmitted applications that are submitted in consecutive rounds to shorten the grant cycle.

Submission Flexibility for Chartered Study Section Members: These reviewers, who serve 4- or 6-year terms, have the option to submit—as soon as they are developed—R01, R21 or R34 applications that would normally be submitted for standard submission dates. [This practice](#) helps NIH recruit reviewers. NIH will seek to expand this practice to include other reviewers who perform an equivalent amount of work.

Review Process Changes

Electronic Reviews: CSR now uses alternative electronic review platforms for about 15 percent of the applications it reviews. These platforms include online discussion boards and video enhanced discussions. We use them when they allow us to recruit reviewers who may find it difficult to travel to face-to-face meetings. Electronic meetings also provide CSR greater flexibility in scheduling and running review meetings.

“Impact” Emphasized: NIH has asked reviewers to focus more on the impact of the proposed research rather than on details regarding the experimental approach.

Streamlining: Many study sections now typically discuss about 50 percent of the applications. All applicants still receive the reviewers' written critiques in their summary statements. In 2009, applications that are "not discussed" will receive criterion scores in addition to the reviewers' critiques, to help applicants assess whether or not they should submit a resubmission application. NIH now uses the term "not discussed" instead of "streamlined" or "unscored" to describe these applications.

Scoring Changes: Beginning with the May-June 2009 reviews, reviewers will use a new scoring system based on a 9-point scale with "1" for exceptional and "9" for poor.

- Before the review meeting, each assigned reviewer will score based on each of the five main review criteria, as well as assign a preliminary impact/priority score using the new 1-9 scale. Reviewers will factor into this scoring other factors as appropriate: the use of human subjects, vertebrate animals and biohazards.
- At the meeting, discussed applications will receive an overall impact/priority score from each eligible (i.e., without conflicts of interest) panel member. To obtain the final score, the individual scores will be averaged and then multiplied by 10. The 81 possible overall impact scores will thus range from 10-90.
- The overall impact/priority scores are usually given, with an application being percentiled against the appropriate base. The new scoring system will necessitate the establishment of new percentile bases. Percentiles will be reported in whole numbers.

Enhanced New Format for Critiques: Reviewers will use shorter standardized electronic templates that will prompt for strengths and weaknesses for each main criterion beginning with the May-June 2009 reviews.

- After the meeting, the critiques will be compiled into a summary statement that will be much shorter (and more focused than current summary statements) due to standardized organization and reporting of strengths and weaknesses.
- Discussed applications also will have a resume that will summarize the panel's discussion at the meeting.

Other Changes

Multiple Principal Investigator Designation: NIH now [permits](#) multiple principal investigators with equivalent roles to submit certain types of applications. This change helps these researchers to receive appropriate credit for their collaboration and to have equal access to critical NIH information related to their grants.

New Investigator Initiatives and Policies

- **Early Stage Investigator (ESI) Designation:** NIH has changed New Investigator policies designed to encourage early transition to independence. Under this policy, New Investigators within ten years of completing their terminal research degree or within ten years of completing their medical residency will be designated Early Stage Investigators (ESIs). [Exceptions are possible](#) under certain situations.

- **Review Clustering:** Applications submitted by New Investigators (including the ESI subset) will be reviewed in clusters, if possible, and reviewers will be instructed to make appropriate allowances for these applicants in terms of their track records. These policies apply only to R01 applications submitted by ESIs and New Investigators. You should update your [Commons](#) account to ensure your career dates are correct.

More Information

Future updates on the Review Process video will be posted on the CSR Web site:
<http://www.csr.nih.gov/video/video.asp>.

If you are viewing a printout of this electronic document, you can access the online version with hyperlinks at this site.

Additional information on these changes and advance notice of other changes will be posted in the [NIH Guide](#), and on the following Web sites: [Enhancing NIH Peer Review](#), the [NIH Office of Extramural Research Peer Review](#), and [CSR](#). We will produce a new video on the NIH grant application review process incorporating the new policies and changes as soon as possible.

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

1/27/2009