Comments for
Scientific Review Administrators

B5   Other Reasons for Implementing Modular Grants

- Makes it easier for the PI to prepare a budget for his/her application; it is less cumbersome than the regular budget application.

- Applicants and SRG members have gotten used to the modular budgets, so it should not be changed. SRG and SRA do not need to pay considerable attention to the budget of 3/4 of the applications that are not funded.

- reduce reviewers' burden, reduce time spent at study section meetings attempting to achieve "pseudoprecision" (a word coined by a reviewer many years ago).

- 1. Focus peer reviewers on science rather than budget. 2. Prevent false precision.

- simplification in writing grant applications

- To make study section members focus on scientific issues more than budget issues.

- Focus the attention of reviewers on the scientific aspects of the application.

- There was a discussion between NIH and the grant community to get a process that would reduce the grants' community administrative burden. As a former program officer, it reduces administrative efforts in some senses, but increases burden in others. As a review officer, it does not always help by deleting information helpful to the reviewers.

- reduce escalating costs per year & allow flexibility to the PI in use of their funds.

- reduce burden on applicants

- To minimize or eliminate reviewer input concerning budget line items.

- Reduces labor for applicants Reduces study section/reviewer focus on budget and budgetary details

- Makes it easier for the applicants, reviewers, and institutes to deal with.

- Reduce burden on reviewers and grants management staff

- Save time for PI during preparation of application

- Reduce administrative burden for Institute program officials; help focus the efforts of REVIEWERS on the scientific content of the grant application by allowing more time for discussion of scientific merit

- To reduce the Peer Reviewer burden of having to wade through lots of cost information to evaluate whether the overall budget is realistic. In some cases, the complexity of this cost info and (e.g.) many contractual/consortium relationships makes it LESS likely that reviewers can discern whether the budget is, in fact, realistic.

- to reduce time spent on budget discussion in study section meetings

- Speeds the submission process in that the PI's Institute won't hold up the submission going over the budget with a fine tooth comb.

B5   Other Reasons for Implementing Modular Grants

- Reduce administrative burden and focus efforts for reviewers.

- At least, in principle, it was supposed to reduce the administrative burden on the grantee institutions.

- They make life easier for the investigators and universities.

- Avoid dwelling on too many budgeting details

- To simplify the budget estimation process for PIs

- x number of grants have to be funded by congressional mandate--takes too much effort on part of reviewers to bother with 250k, the avg grant award

- Reduce burden for PIs and reviewers.

- To ensure that reviewers spend more time reviewing science and less time on budgets

- focus reviewers (not Scientific Review Administrators) on the scientific content

- I believe it was also intended to focus the efforts of the reviewers on the scientific content of the application. Also, I thought it was intended to make budgets simpler for the PIs.

- Questions "b" for both B3 and B4 are unclear. If it truly means focusing the SRA on the scientific content, then the answer here is yes, and I would list another reason is focusing the REVIEWERS on the content, and a more suitable reason. However, if you mean focusing the REVIEWERS on the scientific content, then the answer here is no.

- less demand on the reviewers

- To focus REVIEWERS on scientific content of application (particularly since most budgets are 70-80% personnel), and to recognize that universities have exceptional flexibility in expenditures once an award is made.

- Serves as a general guideline for total budget amounts

- To simplify PI's task of preparing the grant budget.

- reduce program staff's burden

- Reduce reviewer micromanagement of grant applications.

- Pressure for changes to simplify the Grant Application Process.

- Simplify and speed the review to award process.

- to decrease the time spent by the reviewers discussing specific items requested by applicants.

- Focus REVIEWERS (not SRAs) on scientific content.

- HELPS A NEW pi SUBMIT A GRANT APPLICATION WITHOUT HAVING TO WORRRY ABOUT A DETAILED BUDGET

- Attempt to reduce study sections from cutting budgets.

B5   Other Reasons for Implementing Modular Grants

- TO FOCUS REVIEWER'S EMPHASIS ON RESEARCH AND TO GIVE THE POs MORE BUDGETARY DISCRETION. REVIEWERS WERE SPENDING TOO MUCH TIME MICROMANAGING BUDGETS

- It also considerably reduces the time and effort spent by reviewers in evaluating budgets. Further, at the meeting, far less time is devoted to consideration of the budget, allowing the reviewers to focus on scientific aspects.

- facilitate the submission of electronic applications; ease the burden on the PI's institution's grants management office

- Admit the unpredictable aspects of budgets for meaningful novel science, which by definition depends upon obtained results to guide future plans and efforts.

- focus effort of reviewers on evaluating scientific merit rather than budget issues

- The modular budget format has been in place since I started work as a Scientific Review Administrator. I thought that the intent was to focus the reviewers' efforts on the scientific content of the grant application and to reduce the administrative burden of negotiating budget items on the reviewers.

- Even now, we concentrate on the scientific content and the grant-in-aid philosophy as SRAs whether it is a modular grant or not. We do not also treat grant as contract based on budget. However, it has simplified the process for PIs and added flexibility on budget issues. It may help a bit the Program and Grant Management staff as well. Still I would like to see more specific justification on budget requests. In my experience, it is hard for reviewers to make judgments some times.

- One reason given at the outset was to reduce the admin burden for applicants/PIs.

- Focus the efforts of REVIEWERS on the scientific content of the grant application. SRAs are ALWAYS focused on the science, budget or no budget.

- that applicants can make categorical changes to their budgets within the recommended amount.

- Puts the focus at the review meeting more on the science

- To focus reviewers thinking on the science and away from the budget.

- Simplify the application process and put off those items that are Just-in-Time until needed, so researchers can devote more of their application prep time to the science.

- To reduce time spent by fiscal people at the applicant institution.

- To lower administrative costs

- Reviewers can focus more on scientific content, and spend less time on details of the Budget.

- to make a clear distinction between small grants and large grants

- Reduce Study Section time spent at the meeting on the budget. Reduce the review time spent on evaluating the budget as reviews are prepared.

B5　　Other Reasons for Implementing Modular Grants

- Response to the need to change something to reduce paperwork burden of applicants. The easiest target was the budget.

- I think it allows the reviewers to focus efforts on scientific content and allows the applicant to spend more time preparing the scientific content of their applications. I think these are the really the biggest benefits.

- my understanding that it was to decrease grants staff work burden. The scientific review administrator already concentrates on the science. This did not focus them on it.

E2B   Raise Modular Grant Limit Beyond $250K

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- Most of the applications I deal with are over $250,000. Applicants and peer reviewers may be more inclined to spend less time on budget issues and more on the science. Overall quality may increase.

- Some grants need more than that amount, but to avoid paperwork, PIs sometimes just propose under the cap. This could hurt the projects.

- Research is expensive. I would favor a limit at $275,000 now even if it results in more recommendations for reductions.

- Because most of the applications that we review are over $500,000. Modular Budgets usually do not apply.

- Research costs have escalated.

- because many RFAs allow much higher budgets, so I would like to see 4500K be the cutoff point

- If one accepts the value of the MG process, then the limit should be raised as the average cost of a grant increases.

- Would allow projects of greater scope to deal with in modular form.

- Some grants should be allowed to submit modular budgets for much higher amounts with program approval. This is probably best used for grants that have a lot of personnel costs.

- The total must keep pace with inflation. I don't see a need to increase it now, but there may be a need in the future.

- Yes, the ceiling should go up with inflation -- it has been 250 for a few years.

- I would like to get away from modular budgets except for > $500K annual budgets.

- so that other type of applications (P01) can be included too.

- As the cost of research continues to rise, so, too, should the dollar limit for modular applications.

- It needs to be indexed with inflation

- The additional 30 percent of my workload have higher budgets. In some cases, the costs are just over the $250K limit and a higher cutoff would help these studies.

- this amount of funding appears to be adequate for projects with the scope and goals of a 'typical' R01-funded project. Additionally, higher amounts may result in some budget inflation; I have seen some examples of this in the applications that we have reviewed.

- A higher percentage of applications are now coming in with budgets over $250 K as the result of five years of inflation. The concept is still good, but the dollar limit needs to take inflation into account.

E2B   Raise Modular Grant Limit Beyond $250K

- A large percentage of applications today are at the $250,000 level. The true cost of the research is probably higher (or at least will be higher in the near future, given inflation), but some applicants are hesitant to go through the extra work of preparing a detailed budget and/or may be worried that preparing a higher, more detailed budget would adversely affect reviewers' evaluation of the proposal (for several reasons, which I won't go into). Also, raising the limit will reduce the number of applications with non-modular budgets, increasing the beneficial effects of the modular process, such as those you have listed above.

- The cap on the modular budget should be reviewed periodically as a reflection of increasing research costs.

- Should keep pace with inflation. $250,000 was se a while back.

- costs have increased

- We are seeing increasing numbers of applications requesting over 250K.

- The cost of doing science has gone up and I think the modular cap should reflect that. Otherwise we will be getting more and more non-modular grants to review and the advantage of going modular in the first place will be diluted.

- THIS IS REASONABLE AMOUNT TO TAKE ON FAITH OF THE PI

- As the cost of research increases it might be advantageous to up the limit.

- The cost of doing research has increased since the introduction of the modular budget. Should this factor not taken into account as a reason for increasing the number of modules requested? HOWEVER, during this period of limited funding, we should endeavor to keep the funds as stationary as possible.

- Reduce administrative burden for SRAs...but concerned (as a tax payer) that average budget will rise accordingly

- It is reasonable

- Not a compelling reason to have any greater detail above $250,000 than below. The compromise about having categories listed as totals would be okay up to a cost of applications of up to $1,000,000 per year.

- 1) Has not kept up with inflation 2) Not equitable treatment for "small " studies with humans vs."small" studies with animals- small, not complex studies with humans often >$250K.

- It would reduce discussion of specific items of detailed budgets, therefore the time can be spent on scientific merit.

- It makes sense to link >500K permission to submit with nonmodular budget analysis.

E2C   Keep Modular Grant Limit at $250K

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- If the modular grant limit goes up, then budget requests will go up accordingly. A lot of applications request the top amount - $250,000 now.

- Because some of the grant applications requesting budgets higher than $250,000 are multi-project applications or clinical trials with large consortia where a detailed budget is required for evaluation.

- 250K is more than enough

- THERE SHOULD NOT BE ANY MODULAR BUDGET FORMAT. REVIEWERS NEED DETAILED JUSTIFICATIONS TO MAKE INFORMED RECOMMENDATIONS.

- I don't think it should be used at all.

- In this time of limited funding to the NIH, the limit provides the ability of the institutes to fund more applications than would be possible if the limit were raised

- My experience is that the modular budgets attract more reviewer attention to the budgets because they try to calculate what the costs should be themselves rather than just looking at the presented numbers. The higher the dollar amount of the application, the more this tends to occur.

- Current information indicates the level is adequate. May need to re-evaluate with time as "inflation" occurs.

- In some cases information important to the scientific review is contained in the budget information.

- For small, short term projects it does not need to be.

- Contributes to inflating budgets

- A majority of applicants ask for the maximum allowed, such that there is an appearance of an increase in direct costs/application

- For an average size research project it appears to be a sufficient amount, and anytime the project requires more money the applicants can always request for it with a good justification.

- this covers most of the applications I review

- Applications with higher amounts would probably include clinical trials or large expenditures for equipment or supplies that would be more easily apparent to reviewers if directly specified.

- The only applications that need more than this are clinical research and clinical trials. Since these are reviewer intensive applications anyway, they need detailed budgets.

- All applicants would merely shift their budget requests to the new maximum.

- reviewers would have fits

- Would prefer that the modular process be phased out.

- A lot of projects fit in this category already.

E2C   Keep Modular Grant Limit at $250K

- encourage larger requests without the PI thinking about the justification for the need; this would increase the pressure on the reviewers to guess the real needs for the research, and would increase the load on the reviewers

- The current amount encourages larger budgets because reviewers have gotten the message that cuts are not expected or they have no information on which to base a cut. The result is budget inflation and fewer numbers of grants awarded.

- If it is higher then the concerns about the category levels are likely to be more frequent

- Research is expensive and these expenses are increasing. One of the SRA roles in overseeing the peer-review panel that is evaluating the proposed research, is to ensure that the panel scores are appropriate, and accurately reflect the best science. Implicit in this is that the NIH gets the best value for the dollar. The modular limits are fair for single projects and permit appropriate flexibility for both the PI's and for Reviewers.

- Escalation of budgets occurred without justifying the increase.

- It is enough to cover the yearly cost of most applications. If need be the higher cost need can be requested anyway.

- most research projects can be completed within this limit

- An award over $250,000 is very substantial and should be fully justified.

- Larger amounts of money requested would require additional details

- Reviewers complain that they need additional information.

- It is said the institutions generally demand applications to request a higher than normal number of modules.

- Then larger, more complex applications would be reviewed with minimal information.

- Few applications in my study section require > $250K funding. For more $, more detailed justification and expense itemization should be required for cost control.

- would like to see the details for the ones higher than $250, 000.

- reviewers generally have concerns with high budgets, and want to have more justification when bigger amounts of support are requested

- Without some breakdown of the major categories, the reviewers sometimes spend more time trying to guess at what the applicants are spending the money on. They generally like to see how much is being spent on what personnel and how much for supplies and equipment.

- Because the tendency of the applicants is to ask for the maximum budget amount particularly if they don't have give justification for it.

- $250,000 are too much for most of R01 applications. Without justification, a budget more than $250,000 is hard for reviewers to evaluate cost for proposed protocols. it seems that many applicants did not even think about budget issue. It is worried that they just put that number there. Considering this practice of many applicants, modular grant limit should be decreased to $150,000 or 200,000.

E2C   Keep Modular Grant Limit at $250K

- The ten 25,000 modules work well

- Cost estimates, although often later revised, should reflect the amount of work initially planned, and awareness of this reflects sophistication of applicant as much as does publication record.

- It appears to be a right amount.

- The reviewers continually complain that they can't see the budge allocations to see that the money is well directed to generate meaningful results.

- The real problem is that the reviewers cut the modular budget in multiples of $25K, which is too much and could seriously impact on the workscope proposed originally.

- Would increase both the money requested and money awarded.

- Because it should not be used at all.

- The budget may not be evaluated fairly.

- I think if higher than $250,000 per year, it's better for peer reviewers to see the dollar amount in major categories of budget

- As the work of the application increases in scope and complexity, reviewers and staff need to see the components of the budget as viewed by the PI. Experienced reviewers are full capable of judging this part of the review process.

- Reviewers may get uncomfortable with modular grants higher than $250,000.

- amounts have been slowly creeping up so that most applications request $250,000, whether this is what the research requires or what the institution wants the PI to request. So this looks like a good compromise.

- Everyone will start out requesting - say - 300K. The fraction that requests greater than 250K is small enough that it does not constitute a burden on the SRA.

- reviewers are uncomfortable when there are no details.

- accounting is required to may sure money isn't wasted

- Fiscal constraints necessitate maintaining current level and cap.

- Given the present budget constrains, $250,000 is most reasonable.

- No, because I think it would lead to overall higher budgets being submitted by the PIs and it would be an additional burden on the committee to discuss reducing the budget. I think that the limit should be in line with the amount of money NIH is willing to pay on average per year per R01.

- Because for grants that are more involved the reviewers like to have more information to assess appropriateness of the proposed budget.

- Feel that the amount was arrived at by a careful and detailed analysis of existing grant budgets and is realistic for the amount of money currently available for funding of grants-in aid by NIH.

E2C   Keep Modular Grant Limit at $250K

- In the event of bigger applications requesting amounts over $250,000 reviewers prefer to judge the budget in a more detailed fashion

- Budget justifications in many applications are not really sufficiently detailed about even the "big ticket" items for reviewers to have a real sense of comfort that they understand how the money requested is to be spent. Nonetheless, the make a reasonable stab at assuming how the money could be spent and whether the requested amount is reasonable. Raising the modular budget ceiling will likely make reviewers even less secure in their guessing about the reasonableness of the budget request for the work proposed.

- Too difficult to judge appropriateness of requested budget. A higher limit would result in that being the new "base line" for requests.

- In an era of tight funding, money needs to be spread a far as possible. Most labs can be run on $250,000 yr. Salary for PIs should be shared between home institutions and NIH.

- THIS COVERS MOST OF THE APPLICATIONS I REVIEW

- Reviewers are better able to determine budget needs for small vs. large scale studies

- I would prefer amount be limited to $200,000, which used to be average amount before modular grants started. lately, we have observed PIs submitted inflated modular budgets and probably getting more than needed as the reviewers are hesitant to cut budget without proper input from the PI.

- At this point in time with flat budgets, I do not think it would be appropriate to raise the amount. No matter what level the bar is set at, that is the level which the applicant will request.

- Proposals with budgets >250,000 should be evaluated either by Program or reviewers or SRA

- There seems to be no pressing need to increase the amount, given the NIH budget situation. Reviewers are accustomed to the $250K limit and may be less comfortable with bigger budget requests that do not contain more details.

- As the amount gets higher, the reviewers become unhappier at having to comment on the budget without a bit more level of detail.

- No strong reason. I review mainly apps with budgets over $500k, and I doubt that modular will ever reach that threshold. Just don't see a reason to expand it, since my feeling is that reviewers are not happy with it, recipients are not happy with it, and I really haven't seen a large benefit from it.

- As more money is requested, the applicant needs a more defined budget.

- Reviewers may have issues associated with how these larger sums will be spent.

- May influence the reviewers opinion due to the lack of access to detailed budget

- not necessary. Given the constraints on the system, increasing modular budgets does not make any sense. Moreover, it does eliminate a significant number of new and potential innovative leaders because of the lack of budget. They could provide justification for regular budgets. It won't make the system less efficient in any way.

- The concept of the modular grant is flawed and should be discontinued.

E2C   Keep Modular Grant Limit at $250K

- Requesting $250,000 per year as permitted appears to be the de facto lower amount requested.

- Applicants target their grants to be just under the limit. A limit of about $200,000 would decrease the average size of grants and increase the number that we can award. This would be good especially for new investigators trying to enter the funding system.

- Since reviewers currently often seem to have difficulty evaluating applications with modular grants, I believe that higher dollar applications definitely need a detailed budget for NIH to obtain the best research for the dollars spent. One aspect of the modular budget that confuses reviewers is that of salary; when a PI lists a percent effort on the budget page, reviewers take that as the amount of the budget that is going towards the PI's salary which, I believe, is not often the case.

- Too much wiggle room above that

- I think it's appropriate for applicants to itemize their expenses with a budget that's larger than $250,000--for accountability.

- This is a reasonable amount for a standard R01 project.

- This should be sufficient for average grant.

E3   **Reasons for Liking Modular Grants**

E3   Reasons for Liking Modular Grants

- Less discussion regarding budget changes and recommendations.

- Simplification of budget discussions, and the discouragement of reviewer micromanagement of research programs.

- No detailed budgets submitted

- It is easy for reviewers to discuss and adjust if the amount is below $200,000.

- Less worrying about details.

- Reviewers spend less time picking apart budgets.

- Only the salary part for K awards.

- Simplify the administration

- Since reviewers have less information to work with, they may spend less time preparing critiques of these applications.

- simpler

- It can improve flow of the meeting, but, as above, it can also decrease when the reviewers start guessing about what the applicants are spending for what.

- The vagaries of the modular budget discourages micro management on the part of the reviewers.

- Budget in modules.

- Promotion of focus of study section reviewers on scientific issues than budget issues.

- Easy to do an administrative review fast.

- Not having to justify each and every expenditure requested. Reviewers can evaluate the overall cost and leave the budget details alone (i.e. travel, secretaries etc.).

- No more itemized and detailed budget cut with justification.

- Just-in-time

- Its simplicity.

- simplicity

- Time saving in review process and administrative burden.

- less pages to read

- I like it in the way that it is easier for SRA to handle the budget part. However, I think the peer reviewers would like to see some dollars amounts in the major categories in each year's modular grant, like total personnel cost, major equipment cost, etc.

- Simplifies budget discussion and limits the tendency to nickel and dime the budget.

E3   Reasons for Liking Modular Grants

- It removes trivial discussion over minor budget points and thereby saves meeting time.

- It saves time during the actual SS meetings. It eliminates picking at a few dollars of budget.

- I don't have to check the math; because it is shorter, it is easier for reviewers

- 1. Streamlines the review. 2. Does not require the SRA to make the calculations of any cuts that are given in percentages and filling in numbers for all of the years on an application.

- shorter application, less time spent on reviewing the budget

- Eliminates intricate details of the budget. Helps focus reviewers on the merits of the science.

- less time discussing budget during study section meetings

- speeds overall review process

- Managing the review meeting and preparing summary statements is marginally easier.

- Reduces review discussion

- Simplified process with clearness.

- SRA has to do little or no work regarding budgets.

- FOCUSING ON SCIENCE RATHER THAN BUDGET.

- Eliminate the tendency reviewers might over manage requested budget.

- It is slightly quicker in review, but not necessarily better.

- Focus on evaluation of science, lack of nitpicking and haggling on the part of reviewers over minor budget items.

- Time saving for all concerned until a project is considered for funding.

- focus on science

- lack of other support info keeps reviewers from considering that

- Reduced administrative burden, more time for important scientific merit issues

- Simplifies the budget review process.

- It allows reviewers to focus most of their time on the scientific merit of the application.

- It gives more time to the review scientific content of an application

- Shifts focus away from budget. Decreases review time per application.

- Reduces discussion of unimportant aspects of the application.

- Ability to focus on scientific aspects of application, rather than administrative Additionally, ease of recommending changes in modular budgets

- Makes it easy for the SRA to complete the Committee Recommended Budget on the summary statement.

E3   **Reasons for Liking Modular Grants**

- Reviewers are less inclined to make budget recommendations except in unusual circumstances. Normally, this should be a task for program and grants management staff.

- It's simplicity

- Budget discussion is reduced because reviewers feel they can't make an informed budget decision.

- The virtual end of pseudoprecision: Not worrying about what is an allowable cost ("Should we be paying salary for graduate students?"), whether it should be covered as an indirect cost, whether a particular item could be purchased for $5 less, etc. [True story: Reviewer 1 says "The amount requested for that piece of equipment is too high." Reviewer 2 says "I don't know where he can get that equipment for such a low price."]

- simple

- reduced amount of SRA time spent on budget issues at the meeting as well as prior to and after the meeting.

- Speed, convenience.

- More focused assessment. Less tedious discussion of budget items. Non-modular seems silly any way because PI can switch between line items at their discretion any way.

- Budget evaluation is faster than with a non-modular budget.

- Less opportunity for reviewers to knit pick individual items in the budget.

- Flexibility and no needing to know exact amount of expenses

- Allows reviewers to focus on the science

- Overall, it does present simplified version. It is good for PIs, Program and Grants Management staff.

- eliminates budget cut recommendations at the micromanaging level.

- It eliminated the need to calculate budgets, however the narrative is still there.

- Hardly any. Scientists can make and monitor budgets and should learn to do so.

- All of the advantages already listed. In addition, it is my personal belief that, even if modular budgets may include some "padding," those applicants who get fundable scores will almost certainly put the additional funds to good use.

- More attention is on scientific merit. Less time spend to review applications. 'Articulate' reviewers sometimes become over concerned with details in the non-MB.

- If I were to admit to being lazy, I would say that it reduces the amount of calculations that need to be done after the study section meeting. However, I am not lazy and the benefits of having the detailed budgets far outweighs any other issues.

- Meeting time is not wasted with fruitless discussions on minor aspects of the budget.

- The simplicity of it.

E3 **Reasons for Liking Modular Grants**

- Reduction in time to review budget details

- The greater focus on the science for the applicant and the peer reviewer.

- In general, it saves time to applicants, reviewers and ICs staff.

- Simplicity

- Saves time for review. Keeps reviewers from "nickel and dime" or micromanagement approach to the budget.

- I like the modular format and ball park recommendations, rather than the nitty gritty details of detailed budgets, puts science in better focus

- Review Process

- Saves my time as I don't have to itemize the cuts in the summary statements.

- SRAS DON'T HAVE TO CALCULATE THE BUDGET. HOWEVER, SRA'S WRITE DETAILED BUDHET RECOMMENDATIONS.

- shorter justification

- modular aspect, and not details of each item.

- Ability to focus on scientific merit of applications.

- simplicity

- LESS TIME SPENT ON BUDGET AT STUDY SECTION

- ease of preparation of budget

- FLEXIBILITY

- Reduces budget discussion at study section meetings.

- Just in time procedures for small budgets works out reasonably well.

- Budget is a programmatic, not merit issue.

- sometimes helps limit the discussion when there are large number of applications to be reviewed.

- Reduction in reviewer workload and meeting time.

- Theoretically makes my life a little simpler.

- using the modules themselves and its brevity

- It saves time to discuss the budget-related issues at the review meeting.

- Reduce reviewer's time spent on budget at the meetings

- less detailed budget, less work.

- simplicity

E3 **Reasons for Liking Modular Grants**

- simplification

- The increased speed of review

- I think the modular grant application process works really well for R03 applications and those that are for about $50-100K. Reviewers don't try to second guess these.

- Modular grant does discourage "minor" changes in the budget.

- The flexibility to use funds by the PI

- Quick review.

- The simplicity with which the budget can be evaluated, cut, increased, etc. Makes the review of the budget much easier for both reviewers and SRAs.

- It discourages "nit picking" of budget. It is easier for investigators.

- IT IS EASY TO REQUEST BY THE PI AND IT IS EASY TO ADJUST BY THE REVIEWERS

- The fact that I do not have to give budgetary details when reduction of budget is recommended.

- It gives reviewers flexibility It speeds up the budget discussions

- Less time preparing summary statement

- Having reviewers concentrate on the scientific merit, rather than haggling over dollars and cents.

- Decreased emphasis in study section on detailed aspects of budget

- It is simple and easy to discuss at the meeting.

- Less number crunching by review staff.

- It gives more flexibility to PI.

- Reviewers do not spend too much time discussing budgets.

- It may save a little time during the review meeting.

- Don't nitpick the budget

- Reduction of the time spent "nickel and diming" budgets at study section.

- fewer budget pages to review for me and the reviewers

- The simplicity and flexibility.

- Allows focus on scientific merit.

- Reduces time spent in meeting discussing the budget. However, as long as SRAs do not need to actually calculate the budgets as we did in the past, it should not matter. The comments can be passed on to grants management and program staff, and they can deal with the suggestions made by the reviewers.

E3   Reasons for Liking Modular Grants

- The simplicity of the application, not having to request clarifications on improper prepared detailed budgets, and generally less to deal with in the critiques, as most reviewers now write nothing about the budget (when modular).

- Focus on scientific merit, trust the investigator to determine an appropriate budget

- Not having to worry about the little stuff.

E4   Reasons for Disliking Modular Grants

E4   **Reasons for Disliking Modular Grants**

- too easy for the PI to "guess" the budget needed (often at the maximum amount) without having to justify, at least to themselves, the request

- Can't see what is needed

- An appropriate amount for the direct costs of doing a particular research project can be affected by many variables, such as salaries in a particular geographic area, the details of an applicant institution's indirect cost agreement, etc. This makes it difficult for reviewers (e.g., from other parts of the country) to appreciate whether the budget request is reasonable or not.

- sometimes there needs to be detailed info, especially for complex projects with international components

- Taxing the award post review by Program

- If reviewers think a budget is too large they find that the lack of budget information makes it difficult to identify areas where the budget should be reduced.

- Having to field negative comments and hostile questions from reviewers that don't like the process.

- Sometimes reviewers can get a better feel for things like animal cost versus personnel costs if numbers are there.

- none - but given that I mainly review SBIR applications this seems only relevant for Phase I which tend to follow NIH guidelines and stay at or below $100K

- The rare case when more information on the budget would be helpful to understand the budget. This is more often a result of PI error than modular process.

- Sometimes it is unclear if the total costs are justified or not since salaries are not known and costs vary in different parts of the country (or in other countries).

- Reviewers need information to assess the level of activity of investigators.

- My perception is that reviewers are loathe to reduce modular budgets, since they feel they do not adequate info to do so. I believe that this is at the cost of supporting more applications, due to an increase in average budget size, as a result of modular budgets not being pared down by review panels.

- Reviewers need "other support" information to consider whether PIs are "over funded".

E4   **Reasons for Disliking Modular Grants**

- See E3 above: Also, the implication of a module is that study sections are not capable of greater resolution than $25,000 in determining what the work costs. Nothing could be further from the truth since the reviewers are the most competent to do this. Why not take advantage of the knowledge they have? Furthermore, I cannot imagine a single program person having the expertise to know the up-to-date information required to make these budget adjustments and judgments. The module grant application is a poor idea that should be eliminated. I could mention other reasons for discarding it as well. My responses to the survey may not have completely expressed the depth of my opinion that the modular budget process needs to be carefully re-considered. In essence, we are not making full use of the expertise available at the study section level. It seems curious in these times of high technology that by using this method, we are saying that our level of resolution is no better than $25,000. This is a gross underestimate of the study section's knowledge of the current costs for doing research. The reason for modular budgets often given, namely that the IC and/or the PI can re-budget, is tangential to determining whether the amounts requested have been carefully considered by the PI. In addition, it is not sufficient reason that it reduces the workload of the SRA, the study section, and the investigators. In my experience, a detailed budget reveals useful information about the project, which helps in determining its worth. My rather cursory impression is that when modular budgets were introduced the average yearly cost of proposals rose to the $250,000 limits more quickly than could be attributed to inflation. Furthermore, although the Program Officers in the ICs are fully capable and have sufficient authority to reduce costs, if I were a PO, it would be very helpful to have persons in the field inform me about current costs in detail. Presumably, they get that in the summary statement. However, study section members frequently murmur about their unease with the present methods. It is my surmise that they put less effort into careful consideration of the actual costs of a project simply because it looks to them as though NIH is not much interested in detailed and specific information. The concept of a "grant-in-aid" is not well appreciated. Particularly in times of tight budgets, we should be more careful with the costs. I think we can do better.

- Sometimes the PI jacks up the total budget and it is up to the reviewers to guess if the budget is inflated.

- The reviewers probably do not spend enough time scrutinizing the requests (i.e., given less information than in the past they provide less advice to program.

- NO DETAILED INFORMATION ON ALL CATEGORIES REQUESTED AND SOMETIMES PI"S FORGET TO INCLUDE THEIR OTHER SUPPORT.

- makes reviewers unhappy when asked to comment on budget when no minimal level of detail is provided. Even a breakdown of personnel vs. others would help.

- presenting incomplete and unjustified inclusions because it's modular. We may not see many hidden items.

- Unsure amount spent for personnel verse reagents

- Escalating cost

- Reviewers would have a better handle on what the PI intends to do versus what is feasible given the expertise. It also limits the potential for overlap.

E4   **Reasons for Disliking Modular Grants**

- I spend a certain amount of time requesting modular budgets from PIs who send detailed budgets. I don't like to return apps as non-responsive unless the budget issue is just one of several formatting problems with the app. Some reviewers have had suspicions that overlap is occurring, but with no other support, it is difficult to tell....a lot of P01,P30, and other agency grants overlap with what we support.

- Reviewers sometimes appear to need the benefit of a detailed budget to gauge how well the PI knows the particular field. For example, underestimation of dollars needed for a research project can indicate the PI's knowledge of the research area.

- The fact that university sponsored programs still request detailed budgets (as a PI)

- No personnel and other support make reviewers worried about overlap.

- It encourages further "dumbing down" and non-transparency of the research funding process.

- have had no major issues come up regarding the modular budget within the study section for which I am the SRA.

- not enough information is given to consultants to make an informed opinion regarding the budget

- Reviewers dislike not being able to match roles of key personnel to amount of effort to be devoted to a specific project.

- Reviewers are indifferent to reviewing budget; in some study sections the reviewers do not suggest any changes claiming that they are unable to comment meaningfully about the budget in the absence of details, while other study sections seem to inappropriately recommend cuts in line with their enthusiasm (or lack of enthusiasm) for the scientific merits of the application.

- Many Principal Investigators do not know that modules should be in increments of $25,000.

- Less reliable cost analysis.

- Nothing, really. What I don't like are the budgets from top private universities who exceed $250,000 and are non-modular. Usually, these budgets are justified by high salaries. Most reviewers don't look at these budgets very favorably, because they give the impression of an elite system being supported by NIH.

- The fixed 250,000 limit.

- NOT ALWAYS ABLE TO ASCERTAIN IF THE BUDGET IS APPROPRIATE FOR THE WORK PROPOSED, ESPECIALLY IF THE PI IS A "NEW" INVESTIGATOR.

- Too simplify. Lack of important information for reviewers to assess the work

- In some cases a detailed budget would make the anticipated costs more clear to reviewers.

- Applicant's provide too little information in the justification section. For example, often key personnel are listed and their role indicated but % effort is not clear. This makes it difficult for reviewers to judge the commitment of individuals. Also, there is seldom any justification that indicates whether the researcher understands cost factors that are associated with certain kinds of research.

E4   **Reasons for Disliking Modular Grants**

- when the investigator do not list the items or reagents to be purchased (do not have to list the actual expense)

- The concept itself. SRAs can advise reviewers about how intricately they want them to go into budgets and can reinforce that at meetings by how much discussion of the budget they allow. By not having budget details in modular grants, I now get more budget feedback and comment (outside the review) from reviewers than I did prior to implementation of the modular budget format. The commonly expressed feeling from reviewers is frustration over not having a reasonable sense that the work can be done for the amount of money requested. These sorts of comments do not focus on "nickel and diming" applicants, but rather on determining whether the "big ticket" items are appropriately budgeted for.

- Removes an opportunity for those in the best position (i.e., reviewers) to judge the appropriateness of a budget request.

- ARTIFICIAL BUDGET INFLATION

- Reviewers sometimes have legitimate concerns about the costs of applications that can't be answered without budget details, and these usually don't come up prior to the meeting. Flexibility for applicants/grantees is good but there should be basic costs that are presented in the application that, at least ethically, commit grantees to the proper use of funds. Sometimes reviewers are unsure in recommending reductions, (scientists like evidence/data), and they are more likely to give the applicants the benefit of the doubt.

- REVIEWERS COMPLAIN THAT LACK OF COMPLETE INFO ON OTHER FUNDING DOES NOT ALLOW FOR AN ACCURATE ASSESSMENT OF THE PI AND THE RESEARCH PROPOSED

- Often info. that is missing from the body of the application such as key personnel are included in the budget pages; and now this information is lacking.

- The sense that many reviewers appear to have some level of discomfort regarding their evaluation. Also, there are at least some institutes that put a 10% cap on inflation when competing continuation applications are considered. This can put some applicants in a bind, especially if they start with a more modest budget.

- difficulty in determining certain costs (e.g., equipment, cost of conducting particular survey methods, etc.)

- Sometimes it would be helpful to have a detailed budget.

- As per the constant complaints from the reviewers, the lack of requirement to list the salary amounts with the percent effort and the lack of justification of major supplies items.

- the increase in budget without clear justification. I believe the program should still request detail and it should be reviewed by the program person not the scientific reviewers.

- Reviewers are used to evaluating the budget and seem to want to do that. This budget eval. info seems valuable to NIH to me.

E4 **Reasons for Disliking Modular Grants**

- Reviewers want access to other funding, and NIH seems to have dug in its heels. I would yield on that point, as it helps reviewers assess scientific overlap, an area, murky yes, but one where they do have unique insights. I recommend keeping the budget process the same but giving the reviewers all the other support information that we used to give them.

- Everything. It is very abbreviated and lacks details

- Except for the streamlining of the budget, the other administrative aspects, women and children, disbarment, minorities, animal and human subjects etc. still remain. This is no question a bureaucratic impediment.

- I haven't had enough experience with the modular format to have dislikes.

- Reviewers are not able to comment on the budget of a project because they do not have enough information.

- Sometimes the reviewers think it is too much but don't know where to recommend cuts.

- It acts as a trap for young/new investigators as they tend to forget the issue of what it really takes to do work.

- sometimes difficult for reviewers to evaluate if amount requested is too much

- Not knowing how much is spent on personnel versus everything else.

- lack of any details. Some information should be included.

- Missing other supports and no way to find overlaps.

- reduces information

- Lack of knowledge of institutional and other support that effects PIs request for money. Inability to determine whether FTEs are truly adequate for proposed research. Cost of capital items not specified. Cost of expensive lab or diagnostic tests not specified.

- The reviewers have less information on which to make budget recommendations. Usually if animals are involved in the project or if the project involves the use of gene arrays, the reviewers comment that the larger budget is needed because of these. Otherwise the recommendations seem to be arbitrary.

- The requirement that budgets be cut in modules.

- Complicates assessment of PI's ability to conduct proposed research

- Too little information for reviewers

- The fact that the reviewers sometimes propose a decrease in the budget without giving a clear justification

- 1)Sometimes information relevant to the scientific review is included in detailed budgets.   2) The fact that in the modular budget format reviewers are not provided information to evaluate overlap with other current projects and in the modular budget guidelines reviewers are actively discouraged from noting overlap. Many program officers have told me that they would find such input from reviewers useful.

E4   **Reasons for Disliking Modular Grants**

- The reviewers find modular budgets very difficult to deal with and complain about them. While they do know what the cost of research is, that cost can vary considerably depending on whether the PI is asking for salary or not. By just seeing the percent effort, they don't know whether the budget request includes the cost of salary or not.

- Sometimes the reviewers are at a loss and don't have a solid idea of how much to cut a budget even when they know the total amount is too high. Sometimes it comes down to knowing how much to pay a technician in Chicago vs. Alabama.

- There is the potential for overestimating the costs.

- The lack of detail sometimes makes it more difficult for a reviewer to evaluate feasibility and to assess how realistic the budget is.

- WHEN REVIEWERS HAVE DIFFICULTIES IN MAKING INFORMED RECOMMENDATIONS.

- Insufficient info. regarding the budget justification.

- Shouldn't it be expanded for use in P01s and P50s? Perhaps P30s are not that appropriate.

- Harder for reviewers to review budget

- The tendency for applicants to mostly request the maximum amount possible without needing to present adequate justification.

- Reviewers still seem to question the budget justification and amounts listed in the modular budget and often seem dissatisfied with not having exact information when evaluating the budget. I don't think the presence/absence of the full budget affects the quality of review of the scientific merit of the application.

- they could use a bit more info on the budget

- Many reviewers uncomfortable with modular approach, quality of information going to Institutes might be reduced.

- Does not provide reviewers the flexibility they feel is necessary to make budget changes without affecting the quality of the research.

- Budgets for some projects need more details to evaluate, especially when use of animals is involved. Also, though PI's submit modular budget, it seems, most grantee institutions require a detailed budget from the PI, prior to the submission of the grant application.

- Don't know whether the PI is using the modular budget for the right purpose

- Reviewers often to not have enough information to make an informed decision,

- The modular process should be adapted for the present "non-modular" budgets. Percent of time and FTE's on a particular subproject to reflect who is doing what, are much more important than raw dollar figures for salaries. An overall equipment budget and new equipment justification must be retained, however.

- Does not meet many (if not most) of its goals. More confusing for the reviewers than it is helpful.

E4   **Reasons for Disliking Modular Grants**

- Reviewers input on the Budget requested is greatly reduced; unnecessary redundancy in the use of funds is not prevented

- Costs NIH more money per grant and results in fewer grants funded.

- unable to assess the true need of the application

- I don't think that the reviewers have enough information to do justice. Some of the subcategories- equipment, etc.-- should be included.

- Lack of budget specifics, lack of information on their career/grant achievements

- does not seem to fit equally well all types of research projects (animal research versus human lab, for example)

- Probably OK for the $250,000, but higher budgets would cause more debate time at guessing.

- The reviewer is asked to comment on a budget when insufficient information is allowed.

- Insufficient information about the justification of budget.

- too limited info. on major categories especially personnel.

- Sometimes when the budgets are not detailed, budget cuts of $25,000 are not always advisable. However, it seems to work best in modules so this is a debatable issue.

- The increased costs of doing research. Very few R O1s now requesting less than 250K dollars.

- Sometimes, it lacks in detail budget picture to assess the request.

- Lack of details

- less indication of how the PI will spend the money and whether the PI needs the money requested; less indication of whether the PI is knowledgeable enough about an approach to know what is needed

- As noted above, the PI could be adversely affected by the requirement to reduce the budget in multiples of $25K.

- Loss of information.

- Lack of detailed breakdown of budgets and corresponding justification make it very difficult for reviewers to evaluate budgets.

- The reviewers feel that they do not have a good handle on making recommendations because of lack of more detailed information.

- Everything - no information for peer reviewers or staff. Plus applicant institutions require their PIs to develop a detailed budget in addition to the modular one, so it actually ADDS work to the applicants.

- Most parts except the salary part for K-awards. Reviewers has no basis to evaluate the budget justification.

E4   **Reasons for Disliking Modular Grants**

- It's a little unclear when there are issues about budget. That's the time it will be better to have a little more information on the budget. For most grants with appropriate budget requests, it does make the discussion on budget part easier during the review process.

- Most. As Federal employees, we are accountable for the grants we review and manage. Budgets are an important part of that duty. Modular applications 'appear' to help in the paperwork reduction arena. However, a PI still has to 'build' a budget to then modularize it. And someone has to account for the budget down the road. I have always had misgivings about this process. Study section behavior has reinforced my dislike of the process.

- The lack of other support page since it bother reviewers.

- I, if I were a reviewer, would like to see the personnel costs in more detail. I'd also like to see the more detailed 'category' budget as suggested above in this survey. However, given the PI's latitude in moving funds around (that I support), this other info I have mentioned is superfluous.

- My reviewers don't always like not seeing other support and specifics on budgets especially when they are high.

- Unfortunately, if reviewers feel the budget seems high, they spend a lot of time agonizing over why this is because of lack of detail in modular budgets. Often they just start cutting modules. Also, many reviewers complain that modular budgets are impossible to review so they either don't or they spend too much time trying to make sense out of limited information

- Sometimes reviewers do not have enough information to make a valid assessment of the budget.

- The end result is inflated budgets and fewer grants funded because reviewers are unwilling or unable to recommend any cuts in modules.

- Tends to inflate budgets

- Reviewer Complaints that they can't do a thorough job