Positive Signs: Online Review Meetings

> "Finally, in spite of my initial skepticism regarding this "blog-like" review mechanism, all . . . [reviewers] produced comments, critiques, posed questions in a fashion that I would judge to be the BEST I've seen in ~30 years of chairing various review groups."
>
> **Craig M. Jackson, Ph.D.**
> **Study Section Chair and**
> **President and Principal Scientist**
>   **Hemosaga Diagnostics Corp.**

With positive feedback, CSR is advancing its initiative to host secure, Web-based "message-board" review meetings. These "asynchronous electronic discussion" (AED) meetings are being developed as an additional review platform for study sections that prefer them or need them to recruit critical reviewers who cannot attend regular study section meetings. Over the last two rounds, 1,389 applications have been evaluated in 84 AED review meetings.

A Summary of Survey Results: 414 reviewers involved in AED reviews were invited to respond to a Web-based survey, and a total of 232 reviewers responded. Key findings included the following:

- 83% were satisfied with their experience using the AED technology.
- 73% felt sufficiently well-informed to make a rigorous and fair evaluation.
- 84% of reviewers felt the AED format was either less of a burden or about the same.

CSR will introduce new and improved AED software this round, and it will continue to monitor reviewer responses to this new review alternative. Additional information on AED and the results of this survey are available online: http://cms.csr.nih.gov/AboutCSR/CSRInitatives.htm.

Kids Review Grant Applications at CSR!

How could your kids understand what you do for NIH? CSR took up the challenge this year and hosted two mock study sections for kids as part of the annual NIH Take Your Child to Work Day. A group of Scientific Review Administrators (SRA) developed and presented some short, kid-friendly applications: 8- to 11-year-olds reviewed applications like "Which breakfast cereal should I eat this morning?" and "Coat wearing and illness"; 12- to 15-year olds reviewed applications like "The effects of multi-tasking while studying" and "Are high school students made to get up too early?"

"The kids were great," said Dr. Cheryl Kitt, CSR Deputy Director, who helped lead the groups. "They often sounded like real reviewers." Sometimes they would raise confounding variables that surprised us, or they raised their eyebrows at budgets. The kids waved paddles with a smiley face or a frown to vote on each application. They waved all smiles for the study to find breakfast cereals that tasted good and were good for you. But they weren't pushovers. A proposal to study the antiviral effects of chocolate chip cookies was met with both smiley faces and some skeptical frowns. Next year, the "applicant" plans to increase his score by bringing in

cookies for the reviewers. "But he shouldn't count on it," says Kitt. "These kids are getting smarter!"

Should the NIH R01 Grant Application Be Shorter?

Co-chairs of the NIH Grant Application Committee met with the NIH Peer Review Committee (PRAC) on April 19, 2007, and discussed responses to this question that were submitted by over 5,000 applicants and reviewers. An initial analysis of the input showed that the majority supported shortening the R01 grant application. Committee members then went over all responses and analyzed 500 randomly selected responses in detail. Based on this input, the Committee made the following recommendations:

1. The research plan section of the application should be shortened—a majority favored 15 pages,
2. Instructions to applicants and reviewers should be modified to emphasize impact,
3. Sections of the application should be more closely aligned with the review criteria.

A final recommendation was that changes to the application and to the peer review process should be made in a coordinated fashion. These recommendations will be presented to the NIH Extramural Activities Working Group soon. Additional information is available on the PRAC Web site: http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/peer/prac/index.htm.

Reports from CSR Open House Workshops

How well is CSR doing? Leaders from the neuroscience and the behavioral and social science research communities and other stakeholders addressed this question at two recent CSR workshops. These were the first two of six workshops to be held this year. At the end, we expect to receive input from about 300 study section chairs and 700 representatives of the scientific leadership of professional societies and disease groups.

Participants discuss the alignment of CSR's review groups and ongoing CSR initiatives to invigorate NIH peer review. Breakout groups for the different research areas addressed two key questions: Is the science of your discipline, in its present state, appropriately evaluated? What will be the most important questions and/or enabling technologies you see forthcoming with the science of your discipline in the next 10 years?

Summaries of the meeting and the breakout group reports for the first two workshops have been posted on CSR's Web site for public comment. The comment period has ended for the neuroscience report, but CSR will accept comments on the behavioral and social science report until June 11, 2007. The next open house workshop will be held to discuss CSR's disease-based review groups on June 29, 2007. Information on all the open house workshops and links to the workshop summaries is available on the Open House Workshop Web page: http://cms.csr.nih.gov/AboutCSR/Openhouses.htm.

CSR Launches a Web Page for Initiatives Updates

CSR has so many initiatives to improve NIH peer review, it is hard to keep up with them. CSR thus decided to create a Web page to post regular updates: http://cms.csr.nih.gov/AboutCSR/CSRInitatives.htm.

Updates for the following initiatives are now online:

Shortening the Review and Application Process
- Shortening the Time to Post Review Summary Statements
- Shortening the Review Cycle
- Shortening the Grant Application
- Automated Referral Workflow System (Route 424 Initiative)

Recruiting the Best Reviewers by Developing Additional Review Modes
- Asynchronous Electronic Discussion Review
- Video Enhanced Discussion Initiative

Improving Study Section Alignment to Ensure the Best Reviews
- Monthly Integrated Review Groups Internal Reviews
- Bimonthly Open House Workshops to Assess CSR's Review Groups

Other Initiatives
- Development of Comparison Models to Predict the Number of Applications Received by NIH
- Improvements to the Reviewer Travel Reimbursement Program--SREA

NIH Electronic Submission Update
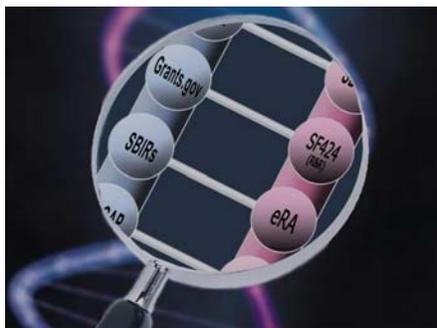
NIH made it through the February R01 receipt date with a smooth transition to electronic submission. It wasn't easy, but all of the hard work, planning and extraordinary effort by the applicant community really paid off.

NIH continues to look for ways to enhance the electronic application process. Following on this effort, the Grants.gov Application Guides (General and SBIR/STTR) for the SF424 (R&R) have been updated: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/index.htm. Throughout the Guides, editorial changes have been made to the instructions to provide additional clarity and guidance based on feedback from the community.

The latest question on everyone's mind seems to be "When will NIH transition from PureEdge to the new Grants.gov Adobe forms?" The answer is that a decision has not yet been made. NIH is currently testing the individual Adobe forms; however, we have not yet been able to do end-to-end system testing which includes receipt and processing in the NIH eRA system. We have determined that NIH will not be using the new Adobe forms for any submission dates on or before June 5, 2007. This does *not* mean that June 5 is our cutover date. It is simply a confirmation that applicants can continue to prepare their PureEdge application packages for submission dates on or before June 5 with the knowledge that they will not be required to switch gears at the last minute. Grants.gov will continue to support PureEdge packages through the end of the fiscal year.

As soon as migration plans are finalized, they will be distributed through the NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts, the eSubmission listservs, and in presentations: http://era.nih.gov/ElectronicReceipt/listserv.htm. Stay tuned!

Six New Chartered Study Sections Debut this Cycle

Where do new study sections come from? New study sections may be required because of excessive workloads or emerging science. In these cases, CSR enlists small working groups of the stake-holding scientific communities that consider options and report their views to NIH's Peer Review Advisory Committee. If it concurs, CSR Director, Toni Scarpa, is likely to authorize the formation of new study sections. It usually takes nine months from the time the possibility of a new study section arises until implementation, with deliberate input from all stakeholders. Recent developments include formation of six new chartered study section that will meet for the first time this cycle (for October 2007 council):

- CSRS/Cellular Signaling and Regulatory Systems, SRA Jonathan Arias
- MIST/Molecular and Integrative Signal Transduction, SRA Raya Mandler
- MSFD/Macromolecular Structure and Function D (computational focus), SRA James Mack
- MSFE/Macromolecular Structure and Function E (mechanistic enzymology focus), SRA Nitsa Rosenzweig
- CMBG/Cellular and Molecular Biology of Glia, SRA Toby Behar
- CMND/Cellular and Molecular Biology of Neurodegeneration, SRA Carole Jelsema

You may view descriptions of these reorganized study sections on the CSR Web site: http://cms.csr.nih.gov/PeerReviewMeetings/CSRIRGDescription.

More information is available in the PowerPoint presentations provided to the Peer Review Advisory Committee: http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/peer/prac/index.htm.

- CMGB and CMND were discussed at the Committee's December 2006 meeting.
- CSRS, MIST, MSFD and MSFE were discussed at the Committee's August 2006 meeting.

 NIH BUDGET:
Peer Review Under Stress

Science **magazine focused on challenges faced by NIH peer review in its April 20, 2007, issue.**

Science **20 April 2007:**
Vol. 316. no. 5823, pp. 358 - 359
http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/full/316/5823/358