



# Module 6

## **Overview**

Now that you have learned how to put your grant application together, it is helpful to understand how your application will be reviewed and evaluated. This module describes what happens to your grant application once you submit it to SAMHSA.

## **Purpose of Module 6**

This module will give you an understanding of the grant application review process and how your grant application is processed through the steps of review.

## **Module 6 Learning Objectives**

During this module, you will be able to:

- Review the importance of SAMHSA's screening and eligibility requirements;
- Become acquainted with the initial reviewers and the scoring process;
- Learn about the SAMHSA National Advisory Councils; and
- Learn about the funding decision and notification process.

## **Module 6 Underlying Assumptions**

- SAMHSA's ability to accomplish specific grant program objectives depends on the quality of its grant projects.
- Applications are subject to a dual review process to ensure that the program requirements are met and that the most meritorious projects receive funding.

## **Module 6 Agenda**

Topics to be discussed:

- Importance of SAMHSA's Eligibility and Screening Requirements;
- Initial Peer Review (first-level review);
- National Advisory Councils (second-level review); and
- Funding decision and notification process.

## ***SAMHSA's Screening and Eligibility Requirements***

- The maintenance of equity for all applicants and fairness in application review are primary principles of the review process.
- One way to achieve equity is through the objective screening of published application requirements.
- Fairness is achieved by applications being strictly screened for compliance to format requirements.

Eligibility criteria and screening requirements cannot be ignored and must be met. When your application is received, it is reviewed for compliance to make sure it meets the basic requirements in the RFA or PA. Refer to Module 3, Handout 3-1, for a list of formatting and screening requirements.

SAMHSA will return an application without it going through the review process if any of the following occur:

- The applicant organization is ineligible for funding.
- The application is received after the due date.
- The application is incomplete.
- The application is not legible.
- The application exceeds the page limits.
- The application does not conform to the format instructions.
- The material presented is not complete enough to permit an adequate review.

### ***Initial Review Group: Scientific and Technical Merit Scoring Process***

- SAMHSA's Office of Program Services manages the first level of the review process.
- This level of technical merit review is conducted by qualified experts and consumers, referred to as the peer reviewers.
- These reviewers are primarily non-Federal experts who work in the substance abuse or mental health field, in universities or hospitals, with community-based and faith-based organizations or advocacy groups, or who have been consumers of substance abuse or mental health services.



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What you should know about the initial review includes:

- The reviewers are your peers.
- Applications that meet all the basic format and eligibility requirements are assigned to peer reviewers.
- The reviewers thoroughly review each application that is assigned to them.
- If a reviewer has a conflict of interest (COI) with any project application, the reviewer must excuse himself or herself from the process.
- The peer reviewers individually assign points to each application based on the quality of the responses to meet the evaluation criteria. The reviewers are instructed to assess an application based only on the information that is included in the application. They do not make assumptions about the application, nor do they provide other information that they may know if it is not included in the application.
- Upon completion of a thorough review of an application, the reviewers independently and individually give a numerical score to each criterion. These individual scores are combined to form a priority score using a mathematical formula. Starting in FY 2007, SAMHSA will move to a scoring system using a scale of 1.0 to 5.0, with 1.0 being the best.
- Each application stands alone and is never compared with another application during the review process.
- A report that summarizes the reviewers' comments is developed for every application that is reviewed. This "summary statement" becomes part of the official grants record, and a copy is sent to you.

Applications often receive comments about both strengths and weaknesses in their summary statement. An application may have weaknesses in some areas but still receive a good score if all other areas are covered. Your goal is to submit an application that receives favorable comments from the reviewers.

## ***Summary Statement***

### **Your report card!**

A final summary statement is developed for each application. The summary statement reflects the peer reviewers' evaluation of the application. It also serves as the official record of the review. After the summary statements are prepared, they are sent to the National Advisory Council.

The summary statement also serves as technical assistance for you and helps prepare you for future grant-writing efforts by letting you know where your application is strong and where it needs more work.

### ***National Advisory Council (NAC)***

- The second level of review involves the NAC.
- SAMHSA and each individual Center (CMHS, CSAT, and CSAP) have separate NACs.
- The NAC comprises professionals from relevant scientific and health fields, as well as individuals representing important interests in the public sector.
- The NAC provides policy advice on the Center's programs and expenditure of Federal funding.
- The NAC may consider policy issues and budget mandates when reviewing summary statements.

SAMHSA's NAC must concur with the first-level peer reviewers' recommendation before an award can be made. Appropriate Federal staff make actual award decisions. The NAC wants to ensure that applications also support the mission, goals, objectives, and priorities defined by SAMHSA or the specific Center. Therefore, it is important to understand the funding agency priorities that we discussed in Module 1 and then write the application according to the requirements of the RFA or PA. Grant program budgets are limited, which means that awards are usually limited to the best-scoring applications. This factor makes the application process extremely competitive.

### ***The Funding Decision and Notification Process***

- Following the NAC review process, all applicants receive a letter from SAMHSA that includes the summary statement.
- Applicants whose applications are funded receive additional notification from the Grants Management Office in a Notification of Grant Award (NOGA).
- Applicants whose applications are not funded receive a letter indicating that they will not be receiving a grant award.

Remember, just as in any competition, if you “played,” you can learn from your experience. Whether you win or lose, if you review your lessons learned, next time you will be even more successful!



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## Summary Points to Remember...

- Understanding the evaluation criteria is the first step in developing an application outline that conforms to the RFA or PA requirements.
- Knowing how your application will be screened and evaluated gives you the opportunity to conduct your own review before submitting your application.
- The review process is rigorous and very competitive in order to help SAMHSA implement its priorities effectively, use tax dollars efficiently, and support community service development.
- Because the process is competitive, often only a small proportion of the applications receive funding.
- Successful SAMHSA grantees contribute to the national body of knowledge and understanding of effective approaches to critical substance abuse and mental health concerns.

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