

**EU/US workshop on peer review:
Assessing "broader impact" in research grant applications
Brussels, 13-14 December 2010**

Background:

Since the late 1990s the US National Science Foundation (NSF) has required grant applicants to describe not only the intellectual merit of their proposed research, but also its broader impact. Broader impact is understood to include, for example, links to education, the participation of underrepresented groups (e.g., gender, ethnicity, disability, geographic, etc.), and the benefits of the proposed activity to society. This criterion continues to be a problematic feature in the grant application process, with many asserting that the concept is difficult to understand, and one that applicants and peer reviewers feel ill-equipped to address.

In the face of this, NSF continues to explore how to improve the implementation of this criterion. For example, the US National Science Board is currently conducting a thorough review of NSF's merit review criteria.

For two years a team from the University of North Texas has been carrying out an NSF-funded study into a comparative assessment of peer review practises (CAPR). This research looks at 6 public agencies worldwide, with a particular focus on the integration of 'broader impact' into the review process (<http://www.csid.unt.edu/research/philosophy-of-peer-review.html>). The European Commission has likewise grappled with this issue, and has strived to incorporate a meaningful assessment of impact in its own proposal peer review process. The approach has been revised over the years, resulting in a progressive narrowing of the notion of impact as an evaluation criterion in successive Framework Programmes. Feedback from surveys and elsewhere suggest that implementation problems persist.

Nonetheless, with funding agencies worldwide being called upon to demonstrate greater accountability, the challenge to successfully integrate societal impacts in the funding process remains acute.

In the light of the debate on simplification, a political commitment to see research as part of the wider system for innovation, and in view of the coming debate on future orientations, including FP8, it is timely to take stock of current practices and to consider options for the future. The discussions will shine a light on both the differences and the similarities in approach across the various agencies, and the logic behind the choices made. This workshop brings together practitioners and specialists from both US and European agencies to help frame the coming debate. In particular, the event will benefit from the ground work and interim findings of the CAPR study team.

Objectives:

The first objective of the workshop is therefore to analyse, debate and validate these findings in a European as well as an American context. The second objective is to help chart solutions for the future. In particular, the workshop will lead to a descriptive statement of factors determining the relative importance of broader impact in *ex ante* proposal evaluation of grant applications, to serve as a reference for policy-makers - on both sides of the Atlantic- engaged in ongoing and forthcoming reviews of procedure.

Participation:

Attendance at the workshop is by invitation only. On the European side, officials from the European Commission involved in the managing of FP7, including the European Research Council, the European Science Foundation and those from certain national agencies will be present. US participants will include officials from the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration. Members of the CAPR study team from the University of North Texas will be present, as will other specialists from academia and industry.

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Draft Programme

Monday 13 December (9:30 – 17:30) 21, Rue de Champ de Mars, Brussels

Welcome and introduction

Clara de la Torre, Director DG Research Institutional and legal matters, Framework Programme

1. Review of the workshop objectives and agenda; practical aspects
2. The story so far: report on interim findings of the CAPR study
Robert Frodeman, CAPR PI, University of North Texas
3. The broader context of broader impact:
Prof. Helga Nowotny, Chair, ERC Scientific Council
Prof. Edward Hackett, Arizona State University
4. Trends and prospects:
Forthcoming milestones in European and US funding bodies (European Commission, NSF...)

LUNCH

5. Structured discussion I

Understanding the landscape: *What are the lessons learned? Are there fundamental differences in approach between the funding bodies on both sides of the Atlantic? If so, what are the explanations?*

- Including Introduction, respondents, further agency testimonies

6. Summary of first day

Tuesday 14 December (9:00 – 13:00) 16, Place Rogier, Brussels

Visit to the Commission's evaluation facility ("Covent Garden") - 9:00-10:00

7. Invited speaker, agency perspective

8. Structured discussion II

Determining the balance between impact and scientific/intellectual merit.
How can funding agencies set this balance in the peer review process?

- Including Introduction, respondents, further agency testimonies

9. Conclusions of the workshop, and next steps.