

ENHANCING PEER REVIEW APPLICATION CHANGES: Reviewer Guidance

Reading the Application

Biographical Sketch Section

- A Personal Statement should be included
- Applicants are encouraged to limit references to 15
- Biographical Sketch page limit remains at 4 pages for most award mechanisms

Resources Section

- Instructions for the Facilities and Other Resources section better reflect the Environment criterion

Research Plan Section

Introduction

- Most resubmission applicants will summarize their changes in the Introduction rather than marking up the text of their applications
- Introduction to Resubmission or Revision applications page limit is 1 page (except T and R25 award mechanisms)

Specific Aims

- Specific Aims includes statement of overall impact
- Specific Aims page limit is 1 page for all applications with this section

Research Strategy

- Includes 3 subsections: Significance, Innovation, and Approach
- Preliminary Studies for New Applications or Progress Report for Renewal/Revision Applications can be a separate subsection within Research Strategy, or it can be included within the other 3 subsections
- Research Strategy is generally 6 or 12 pages (see FOA for exceptions)

Application Sections without Page Limits

- Reviewers need not consider any excess text that is inappropriately included in a section of the application that has no page limits (i.e. Protection of Human Subjects)
- Inclusion of excess text will be flagged in the Summary Statement

Written Critiques and Scores

Significance and Overall Impact

- Overall Impact is not a sixth review criterion, but a synthesis of all the (scored and not scored) review criteria
- In Overall Impact, reviewers should assess the *likelihood* for the project to exert a *sustained, powerful influence* on the research field(s) involved
- The evaluation of Significance assumes that the “aims of the project are achieved” and/or will be “successfully completed”
- Significance of a project should be evaluated within the context of a (research) field, so reviewers should define the research field within the critique

- Significance and Overall Impact Case Studies and FAQs are available on the [NIH Web site](#)

Strengths and Weaknesses

- Reviewers should provide context for the strengths and weaknesses that influenced the overall impact/priority score
- Bulleted points should convey complete thoughts, identifying Specific Aim(s) being referenced, when applicable

Advice to Applicants

- May be used for comments such as a recommendation to fundamentally revise before resubmission
- May be used to indicate that the applicant included excess text in one or more application sections that do not have page limits

Scoring

- The written critique should support the scores
- Lack of personal statement in the Biographical Sketch may factor into the score for Investigator(s)
- Inclusion of excess text in a section that does not have page limits should not factor into the overall Impact/Priority score or criterion scores
- Assigned reviewers whose opinions changed as a result of discussion at the meeting should use IAR to modify their criterion scores and post revised critiques

Summary Statements

- Summary statements for ALL applications will include the criterion scores and critiques posted by assigned reviewers
- SROs will include an Administrative Note if reviewers noted the inclusion of excess text that would normally be placed in a page-limited section in one or more sections of the application that do not have specified page limits

Policy and Review Changes Already in Place

New Policy on Resubmissions: NIH will accept only a single amendment to all applications

New Investigator (NI) and Early Stage Investigator (ESI) Policy: NIH will support NI R01 awards at success rates comparable to those for established investigators submitting new R01 applications

Changes to Review: Enhanced Review Criteria, Templates for Structured Critiques, Scoring of Individual Review Criteria, New 1-9 Scoring Scale, Clustering of NI/ESI and Clinical Applications

Background on Peer Review Enhancements

Goals of Peer Review Enhancements

- Recognize changing nature of research; identify and encourage new and early stage investigators; ease burden on research enterprise; and streamline time to award
- Fund the best science, by the best scientists, with the least amount of administrative burden

Year-long Deliberative Effort Gathering Feedback & Input:

- Request for Information, NIH Staff survey, IC White Papers, Internal Town Hall Meetings, External Consultation Meetings, Data Analysis, Internal and External Working Groups