The NIH Peer Review Process

Sally A. Amero, Ph.D.
NIH Review Policy Officer
Office of Extramural Research

2011 Association of American Universities
NIH Peer Review

• Cornerstone of the NIH extramural mission
• Standard of excellence worldwide
• Partnership between NIH and the scientific community
• Per year:
  ~ 80,000 applications
  ~ 18,000 reviewers
The NIH Peer Review Process

Two-Tiered Review Process

• Mandated by the Public Health Service Act
  – Initial peer review – “study sections”
  – Second level peer review – Advisory Councils or Boards

• Convened according to the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA)
The NIH Peer Review Process

NIH Study Sections

• Make recommendations on:
  – Scientific and technical merit/impact
    ▪ Impact scores
    ▪ Criterion scores
    ▪ Written critiques
  – Other review considerations
• Recommendations are reported in the official summary statement.
The NIH Peer Review Process

NIH National Advisory Councils

• Advise the Institute/Center Director about:
  – Research priority areas
  – Diverse policy issues
  – Concept clearance for future initiatives
  – Funding priorities

• Approve applications for funding
  – Expedited awards
  – En bloc concurrence
Core Values:

- Articulated in federal regulation (42 CFR 52h) and NIH policy
  - Unbiased evaluations
  - Informed recommendations
  - Fairness
  - Equity
Core Value: Unbiased evaluations

• NIH policy requires:
  – Management, reduction, or elimination of conflict of interest
  – Separation of NIH extramural staff functions
  – Confidentiality of applications, associated materials, and review proceedings
The NIH Peer Review Process

Core Value: Informed recommendations

• NIH policy requires:
  – Adequate scientific expertise to evaluate the potential impact of the proposed work, based on the published review criteria.
  – Final evaluation by those panel members who participate in the discussion of the application.
  – A quorum of five or more study section members.
The NIH Peer Review Process

Core Value: Fairness

- NIH policy requires:
  - Evaluation according to established review criteria
  - Publication of the relevant review criteria in the Funding Opportunity Announcement
  - For research grant applications and cooperative agreements:
    - Significance - Approach
    - Investigator(s) - Environment
    - Innovation - Additional review criteria

- See review criteria at a glance:
  http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/reviewer_guidelines.htm#general_guidelines
Core Value: Equity

• NIH policy requires:
  – Evaluation of all applications accepted for review using equivalent review processes.
  – Conduct of both levels of peer review in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and policies.
Additional Information

• Enhancing Peer Review Initiative
  http://enhancing-peer-review.nih.gov/

• Office of Extramural Research Peer Review Process
  http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer_review_process.htm

• Peer Review Policies & Practices
  http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/peer.htm

• Center for Scientific Review
  http://cms.csr.nih.gov/AboutCSR/Welcome+to+CSR/
The NIH Peer Review Process

Contact Information

Sally Amero, Ph.D.
NIH Review Policy Officer
Extramural Research Integrity Liaison Officer
Office of Extramural Programs
Office of Extramural Research
National Institutes of Health

ameros@od.nih.gov