What Happens to Your Grant Application  
A Primer for New Applicants

The Center for Scientific Review (CSR) receives all NIH and some other Public Health Service grant applications. Most investigator-initiated applications for NIH funds are referred to CSR review groups.

Your application is assigned to a review group and an NIH Institute or Center

One or more CSR Referral Officers examine your application and determine the most appropriate Integrated Review Group (IRG) to assess its scientific and technical merit. Your application is then assigned to one of the IRG’s study sections. A study section typically includes 20 or more scientists from the community of productive researchers. Your application also will be assigned to the NIH Institute or Center (IC) best suited to fund your application should it have sufficient merit. (More than one IC may be assigned if appropriate.)

Referral Officers follow established guidelines that define the review boundaries of each study section. These boundaries frequently overlap, and more than one study section may have the expertise to review your application. You may request in a cover letter with your application that it be assigned to a particular study section or IC. The CSR referral office seriously considers such requests.

The combined expertise of the scientists in a study section is intended to span the breadth and diversity of the science it covers. CSR may recruit temporary reviewers or secure mail reviews from outside consultants.

Checking the status of your application

As soon as your application is received and assigned to a study section, information is posted to your online NIH Commons account. Information on the Commons and how to register is available at https://commons.era.nih.gov/commons. You may question either your study section or IC assignment by contacting the Scientific Review Officer (SRO) named in your notification or the CSR referral office (301-435-0715). It usually takes weeks to refer the thousands of applications submitted each round. If information is not posted in your Commons account within 2 weeks of the submission date, contact the referral office.

Reviewers are identified

Your SRO will analyze the content of your application, check for completeness and compliance with policies, and decide which reviewers can best evaluate it. Reviewers have access to your application approximately 6 weeks before their meeting. Each application is assigned to three or more reviewers, and at least two of them provide written critiques. These assigned reviewers lead the discussions at the meeting.

Make sure your application is complete and correct when you submit it because there are significant limits on the kinds of post-submission information you may submit. Contact your SRO if you have questions about what is possible.

Before the study section meets, reviewers confidentially submit to CSR preliminary critiques. Reviewers also assign preliminary scores for each review criterion and for the overall impact of the application. The SRO then uses the preliminary overall impact scores to order the reviews. Applications in the lower half are not typically discussed. This does not mean they are disapproved. Applicants may resubmit a better application after considering the critiques they receive.

The review meeting is convened

Study sections convene for 1 to 2 days. One member serves as chair and conducts the meeting with the SRO. Relevant NIH program staff is encouraged to attend, but they do not participate in the evaluation. Assigned reviewers present their evaluations and outside opinions are read. After a general discussion, reviewers privately submit priority scores to CSR.

The results are released to you

Within a few days after the meeting, your priority score and percentile ranking are available to you online via the NIH Commons. Within a month, your summary statement will be available via your NIH Commons account. It will include (1) the written critiques produced by the assigned reviewers, (2) SRO’s summary of the study section's discussion, (3) preliminary scores for each review criterion, (4) study section recommendations, and (4) administrative notes of special consideration. For new investigators submitting R01 applications, their summary statements are posted within 10 days after the meeting. If your application was not discussed, you will receive the reviewer critiques and preliminary scores for each review criterion.

The assigned NIH Institute or Center takes charge

After the review, an IC Program Officer will be your main point of contact. He or she may help interpret your review results or answer questions about the further consideration of your application. In a second level of peer review, IC Advisory Councils may consider the study section’s recommendations and determine the relevance of your proposed research to IC priorities and public health needs.

View the Video!
NIH Peer Review Revealed
CSR has produced a video of a mock study section meeting to provide another inside look at how NIH grant applications are reviewed for scientific and technical merit.

View the video via the Web:
http://www.csr.nih.gov/Video/Video.asp

Learn More About CSR
CSR organizes peer review groups that evaluate three quarters of the grant applications submitted to NIH. CSR also receives all NIH and many Public Health Service grant applications and assigns them to the appropriate NIH Institutes and Centers and PHS agencies.

Visit our Web site or call for more information:
http://www.csr.nih.gov
301 435-1115

Grant Info
Get info on funding opportunities, application forms, instructions and policies from the NIH Office of Extramural Research: http://www.grants.nih.gov.

National Institutes of Health
http://www.nih.gov

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- NIH Peer Review Revealed Video

- CSR’s Early Career Reviewer Program
  http://www.csr.nih.gov/ECR

- The Peer Review Process
  http://www.csr.nih.gov/ApplicantResources/The-Peer-Review-Process

- Insider’s Guide to Peer Review for Applicants
  http://www.csr.nih.gov/ApplicantResources/Insider/

- CSR Study Section Information – Descriptions, Rosters, Meeting Dates, etc.
  http://public.csr.nih.gov/StudySections

- More Helpful Web Links
  http://www.csr.nih.gov/links

NIH Office of Extramural Research == http://www.grants.nih.gov

- Overview of the NIH Grants Process
  http://grants.nih.gov/grants/grants_process.htm

- NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts

- Writing Your Application
  http://grants.nih.gov/grants/writing_application.htm

- Extramural Training Opportunities
  http://grants.nih.gov/training/extramural.htm

The OER GrantsInfo service provides information and answers to general questions on funding opportunities and grant application forms, instructions, and policies: grantsinfo@nih.gov or phone 301 435-0714.
# Rigor and Reproducibility in NIH Applications: Resource Chart


NIH Website: [https://www.nih.gov/research-training/rigor-reproducibility](https://www.nih.gov/research-training/rigor-reproducibility)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 AREAS OF FOCUS</th>
<th>WHAT DOES IT MEAN?</th>
<th>WHERE SHOULD IT BE INCLUDED IN THE APPLICATION?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scientific Premise</strong></td>
<td>The <strong>scientific premise</strong> for an application is the research that is used to form the basis for the proposed research question(s). Describe the general strengths and weaknesses of the prior research being cited as crucial to support the application. Consider discussing the rigor of previous experimental designs, as well as the incorporation of relevant biological variables and authentication of key resources.</td>
<td>Research Strategy ➢ Significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scientific Rigor (Design)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Scientific rigor</strong> is the strict application of the scientific method to ensure robust and unbiased experimental design, methodology, analysis, interpretation and reporting of results. Emphasize how the experimental design and methods proposed will achieve robust and unbiased results.</td>
<td>Research Strategy ➢ Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Biological Variables</strong></td>
<td>Biological variables, such as sex, age, weight, and underlying health conditions, are often critical factors affecting health or disease. In particular, sex is a biological variable that is frequently ignored in animal study designs and analyses, leading to an incomplete understanding of potential sex-based differences in basic biological function, disease processes and treatment response. Explain how relevant biological variables, such as the ones noted above, are factored into research designs, analyses, and reporting in vertebrate animal and human studies. Strong justification from the scientific literature, preliminary data or other relevant considerations must be provided for applications proposing to study only one sex.</td>
<td>Research Strategy ➢ Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authentication</strong></td>
<td>Key biological and/or chemical resources include, but are not limited to, cell lines, specialty chemicals, antibodies and other biologics. Briefly describe methods to ensure the identity and validity of key biological and/or chemical resources used in the proposed studies. These resources may or may not be generated with NIH funds and: • may differ from laboratory to laboratory or over time; • may have qualities and/or qualifications that could influence the research data; • are integral to the proposed research. The authentication plan should state in one page or less how you will authenticate key resources, including the frequency, as needed for your research. Note: Do not include authentication data in your plan.</td>
<td>Other Research Plan Section ➢ Include as an attachment ➢ Do not include in the Research Strategy</td>
</tr>
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**This chart is based on general instructions for research grant and mentored career development applications. It should only be used as a guide. For all applications, please read the applicable Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) & Application Guide for specific instructions.**