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ORSP Newsletter



OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND SPONSORED PROGRAMS

FEBRUARY 2009

NIH announces new scoring procedures for evaluation of research applications received for potential FY 2010 funding

The following announcement was issued by the NIH on December 2, 2008.

The mission of the NIH is to support science in pursuit of knowledge about the biology and behavior of living systems and to apply that knowledge to extend healthy life and reduce the burdens of illness and disability. As part of this mission, applications submitted to the NIH for grants or cooperative agreements to support biomedical and behavioral research are evaluated for scientific and technical merit through the NIH peer review system. In June 2007, the NIH initiated a formal, agency-wide effort to review the NIH peer review system (<http://enhancing-peer-review.nih.gov/>). After careful deliberation and consideration of the recommendations resulting from this year-long effort, a number of key actions will be implemented in the NIH peer review system.

In current practice, each scored application is assigned a single, overall priority score that reflects the consideration of all review criteria. Individual reviewers assign scores on a 1 to 5 scale in 0.1 increments (e.g., 2.2), resulting in 41 possible rating discriminations for reviewers to make. The reviewers' individual scores then are averaged and multiplied by 100 to yield a single overall priority score for each scored application (e.g., 253).

Although this rating system has served the NIH and the research community well, several concerns led the NIH to consider a revised rating system for grant applications. Making 41 discriminations is difficult for reviewers to do reliably, and scores increasingly have become compressed toward the positive end of the scale. In addition, by averaging reviewer scores and multiplying by 100, the resulting priority score appears to have more precision than it actually has. To address these concerns, the NIH considered scoring systems with fewer rating options to increase potential reliability and with sufficient range and appropriate anchors to encourage reviewers to use the full scale. To increase transparency, the NIH also considered methods to communicate ratings from assigned reviewers even when the application is streamlined and not discussed, or discussed and scored by the full committee.

Additional information is available in Guide Notices [NOT-OD-09-023](#) "Enhancing Peer Review: The NIH Announces Updated Implementation Timeline" and [NOT-OD-09-025](#) "Enhancing Peer Review: The NIH Announces Enhanced Review Criteria for Evaluation of Research Applications Received for Potential FY2010 Funding".

New Scoring System. The new scoring system will be effective for all applications for research grants and cooperative agreements that are submitted for funding consideration for fiscal year 2010 (FY2010) and thereafter. The first standing due date for FY2010 is January 25, 2009; the new scoring system will be used for applications submitted in response to Parent Announcements and Program Announcements, including PARs and PASs published before or after this Guide Notice. An important aspect of the implementation of the new scoring system is to use it in a consistent manner for applications considered in a given fiscal year. Therefore, some RFAs and PARs for funding consideration in FY2010 have due dates before January 25, 2009, and responses to those will be evaluated using the new scoring system. Likewise some RFAs and PARs for FY2009 have due dates after January 25, 2009, and responses to those will be evaluated using the present scoring system.

The new scoring system will utilize a 9-point rating scale (1 = exceptional; 9 = poor). Although a 7-point scale was planned initially, a 9-point scale was selected based on the desire for a scale with sufficient range. The NIH also has prior experience with the distribution of scores from a 9-point scale, based on data on the 1-5 scale when only 0.5 increments were allowed. Moreover, prior recommendations from measurement and decision science experts regarding the scoring system suggested that an 8 to 11 point scale is appropriate.

Not Recommended for Further Consideration. An application may be designated Not Recommended for Further Consideration (NRFC) by the Scientific Review Group if it lacks significant and substantial merit; presents serious ethical problems in the protection of human subjects from research risks; or presents serious ethical problems in the use

NIH announces new scoring

Continued from Page 1

of vertebrate animals, biohazards, and/or select agents. Applications designated as NRFC do not proceed to the second level of peer review (National Advisory Council/Board) because they cannot be funded.

Percentile Rankings. Percentile rankings will be calculated anew, starting with scores from the May 2009 cycle of review, and reported to the nearest whole number.

Scores for Individual Criteria. Before the review meeting, each reviewer and discussant assigned to an application will give a separate score for each of five core review criteria (Significance, Investigator(s), Innovation, Approach, and Environment). For all applications, even those not discussed by the full committee, the scores of the assigned reviewers and discussant(s) for these criteria will be reported individually on the summary statement.

Priority Scores – Discussed Applications. Before the review meeting, each reviewer and discussant assigned to an application will give a preliminary impact score for that application. The preliminary impact scores will be used to determine which applications will be discussed. For each application that is discussed, a final impact score will be given by each eligible committee member (without conflicts of interest). Each member's impact score will reflect his/her evaluation of the overall impact that the project is likely to have on the research field(s) involved, rather than a weighted average applied to the reviewer's scores given to each criterion (see above).

The overall impact score for each discussed application will be determined by calculating the mean score from all the eligible members' impact scores, and multiplying the average by 10; the overall impact score will be reported on the summary statement. Thus, the 81 possible overall impact scores will range from 10 - 90. (Overall impact scores will not be reported for applications that are not discussed.)

Funding Decisions. The new scoring system may produce more applications with identical scores ("tie" scores). Thus, other important factors, such as mission relevance and portfolio balance, will be considered in making funding decisions when grant applications are considered essentially equivalent on overall impact, based on reviewer ratings.

Questions should be directed to EnhancingPeerReview@mail.nih.gov.

For more information on NIH's Enhancing Peer Review effort visit <http://enhancing-peer-review.nih.gov/>.

UMass System publishes first issue of the Audit Newscast

The University of Massachusetts Collaborative Services Center, located in Shrewsbury, has launched the *Audit Newscast*, an electronic publication designed to inform and educate UMass employees on audit regulations, practices, and procedures.

Robert M. Harrison, director of auditory and management advisory services writes, "Welcome to the first edition of Audit Newscast! You might be wondering why the auditors are publishing a newsletter. As business processes decentralize, departments must ensure that business risks are properly managed. This newsletter will contain information regarding good business practices and internal controls, as well as management responsibilities. In each issue, we hope to provide: "How To" training techniques, answers to your specific questions from our "Audit Query" Q&A section, and share events highlighting control issues and successes throughout the University.

Our hope is that by providing this information we can increase awareness of responsibility and assist you in implementing effective controls in your areas of operations." See Audit Newscast at <http://www.massachusetts.edu/audit/>.

Faculty Profile



Lorna Rivera, associate professor of sociology and community planning, College of Public and Community Service, is quickly gaining prominence in developing literacy programs for women through her NIH funded research project "The Impact of Participatory Health Literacy on People of Color with Low Literacy Skills." Specifically, Rivera and her research colleagues are evaluating models of delivering health information in adult literacy programs offered in community based organizations in Boston.

In 2003, Rivera was awarded a National Academy of Education (NAE) Postdoctoral Fellowship (2003-2005) to write the book, "Laboring to Learn: Women's Literacy & Poverty in the Post-welfare Era" (2008, University of Illinois Press). Currently, she is a Principal Investigator at the UMass Boston Mauricio Gaston Institute for Latino Policy and is working on two research projects: A qualitative study of the Chelsea Family Literacy Project that is funded by the National Center for Family Literacy (2005-2008); and, as mentioned in the above paragraph, a study, "The Impact of Participatory Health Literacy on People of Color with Low Literacy Skills," funded by the NIH's National Center on Minority Health Disparities (2007-2010).

Compliance Corner

Research subject recruitment and informed consent documents

All recruitment documents (fliers, posters, brochures, etc), informed consent documents or scripts, parental permission documents, and child assent documents or scripts require IRB approval prior to their use by an investigator. When approved for use, each form or document will bear the IRB approval stamp. Only IRB approved and stamped versions of the documents may be used.

Requirements for conducting cooperative research

The conduct of human subject research often requires collaboration or cooperation among a number of institutions. Each institution that is subject to the federal regulations for the protection of human research participants is responsible for safeguarding the rights and welfare of human subjects. Because of this, the research may need to be reviewed by the IRBs of all collaborating institutions or institutions may enter into a formal arrangement to rely on the review by a single IRB. All investigators collaborating with other institutions should consult with IRB Administrator Kristen Kenny for guidance related to IRB review requirements.

Recruitment of research subjects at off-campus locations

Recruitment of research subjects belonging to an off-site agency or institution (whether public or private) requires either a letter of approval (on agency letterhead) signed by the agency/institutional director or an e-mail communication from the director's official e-mail account before recruitment can take place at that location. For example, the recruitment of children from a Boys and Girls Club for participation in research would require a letter or e-mail communication from the director or site coordinator of the Boys and Girls Club. The recruitment of elderly research participants from a nursing home would require a letter of permission from the director of the nursing home. In all cases, recruitment from schools requires a letter or e-mail communication from the school principal and the superintendent. These letters of permission from agency or institutional directors do not eliminate the requirements for informed consent of participants, parental permission, or assent of children.

Some recent new awards

Katalin Szelenyi (Department of Leadership in Education, Graduate College of Education) has been awarded a \$24,000 two-year grant by the University of Maryland for her project "Crafting Successful Living-Learning Programs for Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics."

Susan Jeghelian (Massachusetts Office of Dispute Resolution & Public Collaboration) has been awarded a \$31,500 grant by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for "DEP South Weymouth Restoration Advisory Board Facilitation."

Kamaljit Bawa (Department of Biology, College of Science and Mathematics) has been awarded a \$60,000 two-year grant by the Ashoka Trust for his project "Conservation and Livelihood Security in Biodiversity Hotspots."

Françoise Carre (Center for Social Policy, McCormack Graduate of Policy Studies) has been awarded a \$250,000 grant by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation for her project "Alternative Staffing Outcomes for Job Candidates and Employers."

Alix Contave (William Munroe Trotter Institute for the Study of Black Culture) has been awarded a \$103,000 grant by the United State Agency for International Development for the "United States-Haiti Partnership Program."

Ellen Douglas (Department of Environmental, Earth, and Ocean Sciences, College of Science and Mathematics) has been awarded a \$149,000 grant by the NOAA National Marine Protected Areas Center for her project "Coastal Flooding and Environmental Justice: Developing Strategies for Adapting to Climate Change."

Jean Rhodes (Department of Psychology, College of Liberal Arts) has been awarded a \$19,000 grant by for her project "Adversity and Resilience after Hurricane Katrina."

Robert Turner (Commonwealth Compact, McCormack Graduate of Policy Studies) has been awarded a \$225,000 grant by the Barr Foundation to support the Compact's mission to "make Greater Boston a desired destination for people of color, immigrants, and women, in the belief that their contributions will be vital to the region's social and economic future."

Kathleen Polley (Department of Nursing, College of Nursing and Health Sciences) has been awarded a \$815,000 grant by the United States Health Resources Service Administration for her project "Accelerated Diversity-Focused Baccalaureate Programs."



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Do you have items you would like to submit for possible inclusion in a future newsletter? Please contact Jim Mortenson at james.mortenson@umb.edu.

