

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services



**Center for
Scientific Review**

Preparing To Chair A Study Section Meeting

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The Scientific Review Officer

Designated Federal Official with overall responsibility for the review process and authority over the meeting

- Selects reviewers and study chairs
- Manages conflicts-of-interest
- Independently assigns reviewers to applications
- Trains reviewers in review policy and process
- Oversees the review meeting process to ensure fairness and appropriate application of NIH policies
- Independently prepares summary statements including the resume

Role of the Chair

Study section leader, discussion facilitator, SRO's meeting partner

- Facilitate good discussions that clearly identify score driving points
- Inhibit inappropriate discussion
- Maintain a culture of respect and inclusion
- Support the SRO in implementing NIH review policies
- Summarize *discussions*
- Control discussions, keep the meeting on time

Before the Meeting

- Meet with the SRO
- Familiarize yourself with the grant applications that will be discussed
- Read selected critiques

Pre-Meeting Discussion with SRO

- Raise with SRO any questions, concerns, priorities you have, hear their priorities
- Policies. New policies? Implementation issues?
 - e.g. attention to rigor, SABV, clinical trials
- Committee function
 - Anything need attention? e.g. score compression, time management,
- Practical details
 - applications with widely spread scores, reviewer availability/restrictions, schedule
 - Who is the ECR, any other first time reviewers,
- Communications and division of duties, especially with video meetings

Read Applications and Critiques in Advance?

- Practices of good chairs vary
- CSR does not expect or recommend that you read every application, or every set of abstracts and aims. Ditto for critiques
- Read enough of the abstracts/aims to be comfortable with what will be discussed
- Reading critiques in advance is not generally needed. Exceptions may be cases where there is marked reviewer disagreement
- Do not read critiques to “get a head start” on your summaries. Summaries are based on discussion in the meeting, not the content of critiques

At the Meeting

- Encourage lively, respectful engagement of the entire panel
- Ensure attention to all required elements of review
 - Use the cheat-sheet!
- Cutoff repetitive and non-productive exchanges
- Maintain a collegial (“safe”) atmosphere
- Be neutral, be fair
- Support ECRs, new reviewers, shy reviewers
- Model collegial discussion across demographic and career stage differences
- Limit your “reviewer” comments while chairing
- Keep things moving

Also, at the Meeting

- *Listen*, and summarize
- Be a model reviewer
 - When presenting your reviews you have a chance to show other reviewers what you expect
- Model integrity, enforce confidentiality
- Defer to SRO on policy issues

Post-Meeting

- Sign and Date the “Meeting Minutes”
- Debrief. Meet with SRO right after the meeting
- Discuss what went well and what didn't
 - Did you successfully address any concerns you had identified in advance of the meeting?
 - Are there Items that need attention going forward?
- Give the SRO feedback on reviewers, esp. ad hocs
- Update your critiques, if necessary
- When that's done, you're done

CSR Expectations for Summaries

Summaries should focus reviewers' attention on appropriate, score driving points. They should help keep the panel engaged, not substitute for full attention

- Chair summaries should:
 - Summarize the discussion (not the written critiques)
 - Integrate the discussion, not recite it
 - Emphasize evaluative comments and spend minimal time describing the grant aims and methods.
 - Highlight score driving issues
 - Always address “Significance”
 - Be balanced and fair
 - Note areas of consensus and where there were differences of opinion
- Be concise (a couple of minutes)

Practical Tips

- Be rested
- Be prepared
- Be focused
- Listen
- Take notes in a format that helps you
 - Your SRO may be able to prepare helpful templates
- Take input from the committee

Thanks!