



**Center for
Scientific Review**

Preparing to Chair a Study Section Meeting

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Summer 2021

Know the Roles

- **Chair:** facilitate discussion; help SRO enforce review policy and good practices; spiritual leader of the study section
- **SRO:** Designated Federal Official; review policy expert; study section administrator.
- **Panel:** evaluates and scores the scientific and technical merit of grant applications.

SROs

- DFO: Legal authority over the meeting; meeting cannot proceed without DFO
- Independently selects and assigns reviewers
- Independently prepares summary statements

Panels

- Entire study section scores grants.
- Entire study section should evaluate grants
- Grant reviewers are not mentors, not journal editors. [The sole purpose of grant review is to identify the best science.](#)

Communicate! Before, during and after

Have a premeeting meeting

- Committee function- Anything need attention? e.g. score compression, time management
- Policy/Practice- Anything new?
- People- ESA, tech support, new reviewers, ECRs

During the meeting

- Agree on your channel- chat, text, email?
- Contacts for ESA, and events management (CSR Zoom support)

After the meeting

- Debrief. What went well, what didn't?
- Did concerns and priorities get addressed?
- Feedback on ad hoc reviewers to SRO
- Are there items that need attention going forward?

Key Meeting Tasks

1. Facilitate the discussion.
2. Be sure all criteria are addressed.
 - Use a cheat sheet
3. Summarize the discussion.
4. Keep it on time.
 - Critical to fairness
 - 15-20 minutes requires focus on score driving evaluation.

Facilitating Discussion

- Encourage lively, respectful engagement of the *entire panel*.
- Non-assigned reviewers should question what they don't understand, clarify the basis for scores, challenge scores that are discordant with comments, add additional perspectives that have not been voiced
- Maintain a collegial (“safe”) atmosphere
- Support ECRs, new reviewers, shy reviewers; rein in reviewers who cut others off
- Be neutral, be fair but cutoff discussions that are repetitive or nonproductive.
- Clarity, rather than consensus, is your goal
- Listen for bias, either positive or negative; keep the focus on review criteria
- Limit your “reviewer” comments while chairing

Require a thoughtful evaluation of *Significance*

- Reviewers confuse public health need with scientific importance.
- *“Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field?”*
- Intellectually challenging; easier to dissect the methodology
- Emotionally challenging; hard to say that the idea is bad, but it’s unfair not to when that’s so.
- Requires breadth of perspective.
- Challenge high impact scores that are based on “no weaknesses”– orient back to the score chart – a potentially incremental advance with NO weaknesses in the approach cannot score in the 1-3 range.

Summaries

Summaries should focus the panel's attention on appropriate, score driving points.

Do

- Summarize score driving strengths and weaknesses
- Note views on “Significance”
- Note areas of consensus and points of difference
- Be balanced and fair

Don't

- Spend more than a sentence describing the grant
 - List every little point made
 - Summarize the written critiques
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- Good summaries are concise (a couple of minutes)
 - Chair's notes are for the chair, not the SRO. SROs keep their own notes and independently prepare summaries.

Read applications and critiques in advance?

- 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

Be rested.
Minimize distraction.
Eliminate interruptions from work.

Thanks!