



Center for
Scientific Review

Simplifying Review Framework – An Update

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BACKGROUND

Main Goals of the Simplified Review Framework (SRF)

- **Refocus first-level peer review on its singular role of providing advice to the agency regarding the scientific/technical merit of grant applications**
 - Reframes criteria to focus reviewer attention on 3 key questions
 - Removes distractions of certain administrative compliance items
- **Mitigate reputational bias [e.g. institutional reputation, investigator pedigree] in the peer review process**
 - Refocuses evaluation of investigator and environment to be within the context of the proposed research project

Facilitate the overarching goal of peer review: identification of the strongest, potentially highest-impact research

Research Project Grant Review: 5 Criteria → 3 Factors

Applications submitted before January 25, 2025

Overall Impact Score based on 5 criteria

- Significance – scored 1-9
- Investigator(s) – scored 1-9
- Innovation – scored 1-9
- Approach – scored 1-9
- Environment – scored 1-9

Applications submitted on or after January 25, 2025

Overall Impact Score based on 3 Factors

- **Factor 1: Importance of the Research** (*should it be done?*)
 - Scored 1-9
- **Factor 2: Rigor and Feasibility** (*can it be done well?*)
 - Scored 1-9
- **Factor 3: Expertise and Resources** (*are the expertise and resources in place to do it?*)
 - Evaluated as “appropriate” or “additional expertise/resources needed”; if additional needs are identified, comments are required
 - Gaps in expertise and/or resources should affect Overall Impact score

IMPLEMENTATION UPDATES

SRF Implementation Activities Update

Preparing the extramural community for SRF

- Ensure that the community is aware of changes: *what is SRF and how does it affect “me”*

Internal NIH preparations

- Funding announcement reissuing
- Training staff
- Updating review systems and resources

Preparing the extramural community for SRF-what is SRF?

Public SRF site:
continuously
updated
information,
FAQs, contact
information

The screenshot shows the NIH Grants website page for 'Simplifying Review of Research Project Grant Applications'. The page is under the 'POLICY & COMPLIANCE' section. It features a navigation menu at the top with links for HOME, ABOUT GRANTS, FUNDING, POLICY & COMPLIANCE, NEWS & EVENTS, and ABOUT OER. The main content area includes a breadcrumb trail: Home > Policy & Compliance > Peer Review Policies and Practices > Simplifying Review of Research Project Grant. The page title is 'Simplifying Review of Research Project Grant Applications'. The text states: 'NIH is implementing a simplified framework for the peer review of the majority of competing research project grant (RPG) applications, beginning with submissions with due dates of January 25, 2025. The simplified peer review framework is designed to:'. A list of three points follows: 1. Enable peer reviewers to better focus on answering the key questions necessary to assess the scientific and technical merit of proposed research projects; 2. Mitigate the effect of reputational bias, refocusing the evaluation of investigator/environment to within the context of the proposed research; 3. Reduce reviewer burden, shifting policy compliance activities to NIH staff. A 'RESOURCES AVAILABLE' box contains the text 'Join us for an overview of the simplifying review changes.' and a 'Learn more' button. A 'Background' section is partially visible at the bottom.

<https://grants.nih.gov/policy/peer/simplifying-review.htm>

Postcards handed out at conferences

The postcard features a QR code in the top left corner. Below the QR code, the text reads: 'We're strengthening the peer review of research project grants.' The background is a solid blue color.

NIH is implementing a simplified review framework to better identify the highest impact research. The new framework will reorganize the five regulatory criteria under three factors and reduce the number of non-score driving review considerations during the first stage of review.



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Pronouns: she/her/hers

Email signatures with SRF link

Fairness matters. Say something! For possible violations of peer review integrity, contact your Scientific Review Officer (SRO), the CSR Review Integrity Officer at csrrio@mail.nih.gov or the NIH Review Policy Officer at reviewpolicyofficer@mail.nih.gov. For issues related to respectful interactions, bias or anything else that could affect the fairness of the review process, contact your SRO or send a message to reportbias@csr.nih.gov.

Alert: For due dates on or after Jan 25, 2025 - changes coming to how most research grant applications will be reviewed. [Learn about the new simplified review framework.](#)

Preparing the extramural community for SRF - how does SRF affect “me”?

POLICY & COMPLIANCE

Policy Topics

Peer Review Policies and Practices

Revisions to the NIH Fellowship Application and Review Process

Simplifying Review of Research Project Grant Applications

Background

Simplified Peer Review Framework

Reviewer Guidance

Applicant Guidance

FAQ

Training and Resources

Notices

Managing Conflict of Interest

Consolidated List of Reviewer Documents

Applicant Guidance for Simplifying the Review Framework for Most Research Project Grants

The **simplified review framework** is a **new way of reviewing the same research strategy**. Although the framework has little impact on what is included in an application, it does have significant impact on the funding opportunities used to apply. This page provides practical guidance for applicants navigating funding opportunities through this transition.

How to Tell if Your Application Will be Impacted

Simplified peer review applies to most, but not all research project grants (RPGs). For example, none of our small business or complex, multi-project grants are included in this initiative.

Applicability

- Activity codes: R01, R03, R15, R16, R21, R33, R34, R36, R61, RC1, RC2, RC4, RF1, RL1, RL2, U01, U34, U3R, UA5, UC1, UC2, UC4, UF1, UG3, UH2, UH3, UH5, (including the following phased awards: R21/R33, UH2/UH3, UG3/UH3, R61/R33).
- Applications submitted to due dates on or after January 25, 2025.

Tips for Applicants

- Verify whether the activity code for your target funding opportunity is impacted and identify your target due date.
 - If your activity code is impacted by the new framework and your target due date is on or after January 25, 2025, pay extra attention to the opportunity you use to apply.
 - Funding opportunities with a mix of due dates before and after January 25, 2025 may be reissued and/or expired early since a single opportunity cannot accommodate two sets of review information.

Ensuring You Are Applying to the Right Funding Opportunity Using the Correct Forms

As NIH implements the simplified review framework, you will find funding opportunities being expired and/or reissued to ensure applicants are presented with the correct review information for their target due date.

While there are no application form changes associated with this initiative, NIH is moving to new application forms (FORMS-I) to support **other initiatives** for due dates on or after January 25, 2025 (**NOT-OD-24-086**). Therefore, all funding opportunities with the new review framework will also include updated forms.

Using the correct funding opportunity and application form version for your due date is critical to success. Applications submitted using a funding opportunity that is no longer available for a specific due date or submitted using the incorrect form version will be withdrawn and removed from funding consideration.

Tips for Applicants Applying to Impacted Funding Opportunities for Due Dates on or after January 25, 2025

Need to move an existing application to apply to a different funding opportunity?

Take advantage of copy features in ASSIST, Grants.gov Workspace, and many institutional submission systems.

[ASSIST Online Help: Copy Application](#)

[Grants.gov Online Help: Copy Workspace](#)

Guidance to applicants

Will my application be impacted?

Applying to the correct Funding Announcement.

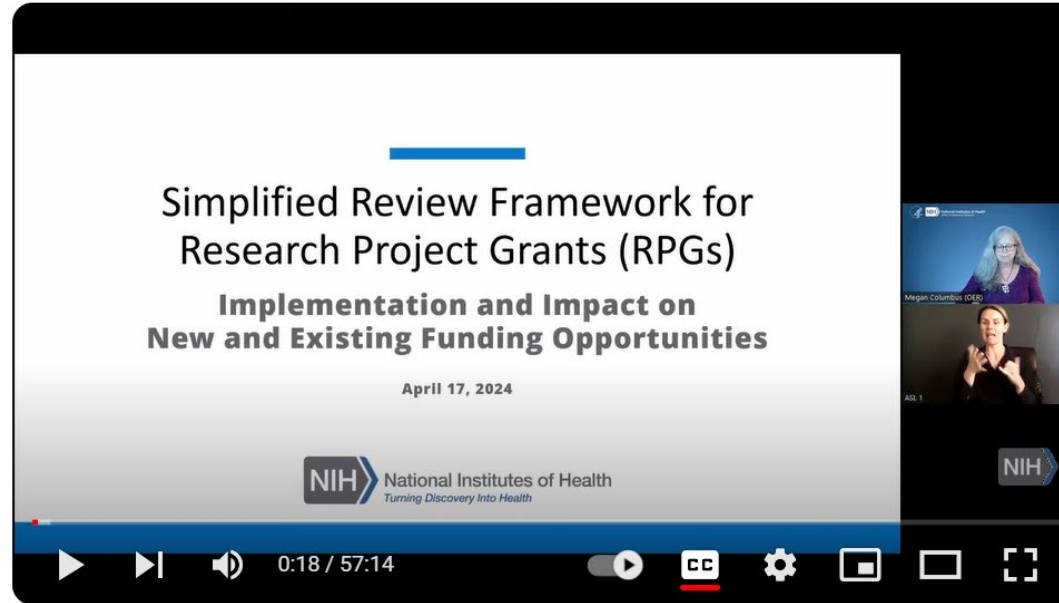
No major changes to application structure/organization.

<https://grants.nih.gov/policy/peer/simplifying-review/applicant-guidance.htm>

Preparing the extramural community for SRF - how does this affect “me”?

Research Project Grant Funding Announcements must contain the new Review Framework and requires re-issuing hundreds of funding announcements: [NOT-OD-24-085](#) (April 4, 2024)

Public Webinar
April 17, 2024



Participants: 2,404

Recording Accessed: 1229

Detailed how applicants can find reissued Funding Opportunities and avoid applying to “expired” Announcements.

Staff Training: Program Officers and other Extramural Offices

Reissuing Process

- Multiple Guidance Notices, policy/process exemptions and tools put in place to ensure as efficient a process as possible
- March 21, 2024: Simplified Review Framework: Funding Announcement Development/Reissuance Training Webinar for staff

Participants: 953

Recording Accessed: 60

- Committee Members have recurring meetings with Institute and Center members involved in the process to address questions as they come up.

Reissuing is a complex process, but is going smoothly and Reissued Announcements are expected to be published between October and December 2024

Staff Training: Scientific Review Officers (SRO)

May
2024

- CSR SRO Training Workshop: Introduction to Simplified Review Framework (Rationale of the changes)
- Participants: 253 Recording Accessed: 108 page views

July
2024

- NIH Institute SRO Training Workshop: Introduction to Simplified Review Framework (Rationale of the changes)
- Participants: 240 Recording Accessed:105

Sept
2024

- SRO labs/small group discussion - more immersive experience with new criteria
- Similar resources will be made available to Institute Review Groups

Jan
2025

- SRO workshop on reviewer training for SRF
- Support staff training begins

Spring
2025

- Dedicated chair training for SRF
- SRO labs/small group discussion on intervening during the meeting on SRF-related issues

Updating Review Systems and Resources

Sample Critique Template

Sample Summary Statement

Principal Investigator(s):

OVERALL IMPACT

Reviewers will provide an overall Impact score to reflect their assessment of the likelihood for the project to exert a sustained, powerful influence on the research field(s) involved, in consideration of the following scored review criteria, and additional review criteria. An application does not need to be strong in all categories to be judged likely to have major scientific impact.

Overall Impact Write a clear, concise paragraph that explains the basis for your score. Identify and weigh the most important strengths and weaknesses of the application.

REVIEW CRITERIA

Reviewers will evaluate Factors 1, 2 and 3 in the determination of scientific merit, and in providing an overall impact score. In addition, Factors 1 and 2 will each receive a separate factor score.

Factor 1. Importance of the Research (Significance and Innovation)

Major Score-Drivers

Strengths

-

Weaknesses

-

Factor 2. Rigor and Feasibility (Approach)

Major Score-Drivers

Strengths

-

Weaknesses

-

Inclusion Plans Applicable Only for Human Subjects research and not IRB Exemption #4

As part of their evaluation, reviewers should consider the population characteristics of the disease, condition, behavior, and/or the scientific goals of the work proposed:

- Sex/Gender: [Click Here to Select](#)

SRF RPG Critique Template - **SAMPLE ONLY, NOT FOR USE** Page 1 of 3

- Race/Ethnicity: [Click Here to Select](#)
- For NIH-Defined Phase III trials, plans for valid design and analysis (applicable to sex/gender and race/ethnicity): [Click Here to Select](#)
- Based on Age: [Click Here to Select](#)

If not previously addressed in Factor 2 Major Score-Drivers, briefly address specific concerns regarding inclusion or plans for valid design and analysis:

-

Factor 3. Expertise and Resources (Investigator(s) and Environment)

[Click Here to Select](#)

Address specific gaps in expertise or resources needed to carry out the project:

-

Application # PI Last Name, First Name

RESUME AND SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION:

DESCRIPTION (provided by applicant):

PUBLIC HEALTH RELEVANCE:

CRITIQUE 1

Importance of the Research (Significance and Innovation): *(Factor score 1-9)*
Rigor and Feasibility (Approach): *(Factor score 1-9)*
Expertise and Resources (Investigators and Environment): *Appropriate or Additional Expertise and/or Resources Needed*

Overall Impact:

1. Importance of the Research (Significance and Innovation):

Major Score-Drivers

Strengths

-

Weaknesses

-

2. Rigor and Feasibility (Approach):

Major Score-Drivers

Strengths

-

Weaknesses

-

Inclusion Plans:

- Sex/Gender: Scientifically justified or Not scientifically justified or Not Applicable
- Race/Ethnicity: Scientifically justified or Not scientifically justified or Not Applicable
- For NIH-Defined Phase III trials, Plans for valid design and analysis (applicable to sex/gender and race/ethnicity): Adequate for work proposed or Not adequate for work proposed or Not Applicable
- Inclusion/Exclusion Based on Age: Scientifically justified or Not scientifically justified or Not Applicable

3-FACTOR FRAMEWORK

Main review criteria assessments organized around 3 Factors instead of 5 criteria. Factor scores only listed for Factors 1 and 2.

INCLUSIONS AND PLANS FOR VALID DESIGN/ ANALYSIS

Drop-down selections will remain the same for Inclusion plans, but will be listed under Factor 2 instead of Additional Review Criteria Section. Similarly, the drop-down assessment for plans for valid design and analysis for Phase III clinical trials will now be listed under Factor 2. Reviewers will only provide written comment if concerns are identified in the drop-down selection.

Resources and Information:

<https://grants.nih.gov/policy/peer/simplifying-review.htm>

Questions? simplifiedreview@nih.gov