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[www.nationalservice.gov/for\\_individuals](http://www.nationalservice.gov/for_individuals) and at  
[www.nationalservice.gov/egrants/index.asp](http://www.nationalservice.gov/egrants/index.asp)

## **Become a Peer Reviewer or Facilitator**

### **Background on Corporation for National and Community Service**

In January 2002, President Bush created the USA Freedom Corps to foster a new culture of "citizenship, service, and responsibility." The Corporation for National and Community Service, as an integral part of the USA Freedom Corps, connects Americans of all ages and backgrounds with opportunities to give back to their communities and country through three programs: *AmeriCorps*, *Senior Corps*, and *Learn and Serve America*. The Corporation strives to engage Americans in voluntary service opportunities with their communities and country to meet the nation's educational, public safety, environmental, homeland security, and other human needs. In doing so, the Corporation improves lives, strengthens communities, and fosters civic engagement through service and volunteering. Each year, the Corporation provides opportunities for more than 2 million Americans to serve their communities through its three primary programs: *AmeriCorps*, *Senior Corps*, and *Learn and Serve America*.

The Corporation is the nation's largest grant maker supporting national and community service programs and volunteerism. A portion of our programs are run through competitive grants to non-profit organizations. The Corporation's statute requires that we "consult outside experts" in making competitive award decisions. As a result, the Corporation convenes peer review panels to review applications in its grant competitions. Throughout the year, the Corporation seeks people to serve as Peer Reviewers and panel Facilitators for a series of grant application reviews.

**If you would like to serve as a Peer Reviewer or a Facilitator in a grant review, please read further and complete the required Peer Reviewer application at: <http://www.nationalservice.gov> following the link for eGrants. If you know someone who may be interested, please forward this information to them.** Instructions for completing the Peer Reviewer application are available at: [www.nationalservice.gov/for\\_individuals](http://www.nationalservice.gov/for_individuals) or by contacting the Corporation via e-mail at [PeerReviewers@cns.gov](mailto:PeerReviewers@cns.gov).

### **What is a Peer Review?**

The Corporation uses external Reviewers to read competitive applications, provide an evaluation of the quality of each application, and rate those applications based on published criteria. The Corporation subsequently takes the comments and ratings from the peer review into consideration with other elements when making funding decisions.

### **Peer Review Models**

Over the years, our *AmeriCorps*, *Learn and Serve America*, and *Senior Corps* programs have used several review combinations and models. Review models can vary from program to program and from year to year depending on the resources

available and the characteristics of each grant competition. The following are examples of peer review models:

#### Two-stage Onsite Review

- Stage one – A panel comprised of three Reviewers typically read proposals individually, evaluate, and rate them, and submit their comments and scores using our Web-based grant review system: eGrants. The Facilitator reads proposals at this stage as well, but is not required to rate and evaluate them. No group discussion occurs in this stage.
- Stage two – The panel (three Reviewers and one Facilitator) travels to Washington DC or a determined location, and convene for a period of two days to discuss the proposals and reach consensus with other members of the panel. During this stage, the Facilitator moderates the consensus discussion and produces a panel consensus rating sheet.

#### One-stage Field Review using teleconferencing

- A panel comprised of three Reviewers typically read proposals individually, evaluate, and rate them, and submit their comments and scores using our Web-based grant review system: eGrants. A Facilitator assigned to the panel reads proposals at this stage as well, but is not required to rate and evaluate them.
- The panel (three Reviewers and the Facilitator) then discusses applications via conference calls and email for a period of one week to reach consensus on the panel. While on the conference call, the Facilitator moderates the consensus discussion.

### **Responsibilities of Reviewers:**

As part of the Corporation's grant application review process, Reviewers are required to read, evaluate, and rate proposals. Whether a part of an individual review or a panel review, reviewers will be required to submit a clear and thorough evaluation and quality rating for each application read in the form of an Individual Reviewer Worksheet. For a panel review, reviewers will discuss their findings with other members of the panel. Reviewers may be required to come to consensus on the quality of the applications and/or prepare the final review form that reflects the group's consensus.

### **Responsibilities of Facilitators:**

Facilitators are required to read all proposals assigned to their panel, facilitate panel conference calls and panel meetings, write or edit final consensus review forms, and make sure that all work is complete. The primary responsibilities of a Facilitator are to guide, monitor and support the work of the reviewers; to ensure thoughtful, objective, well-documented appraisals of all applications; to ensure that panelists keep to the review schedule; and to manage the writing responsibilities. Depending on the review model, these responsibilities might include preparing final review forms that reflect the group consensus. Facilitators will also assist in resolving any conflicts among the panelists and guiding them to consensus on evaluating, rating and ranking the proposals. Each panel is responsible for reviewing an average of ten proposals. Consensus may or may not be required. In instances where consensus is not required, the role of the Facilitator is not used.

*In each review, both the Reviewers and the Facilitator share the responsibility of producing the final Consensus Form; however, the role of the primary preparer of the Consensus Form can vary.*

## **Qualifications of Reviewers and Facilitators:**

The Corporation seeks a diverse group of Reviewers and Facilitators who have substantial experience in the areas of national service, volunteer management, education, literacy and tutoring, human services, nonprofit management, homeland security, public safety, or the environment. A Reviewer may be a practitioner, educator, administrator/manager, analyst, researcher, evaluator, or volunteer in any of the stated fields. Reviewers may work or volunteer in community or faith-based organizations; national organizations; national or community foundations; municipal, state or federal agencies; higher education institutions; or elementary, middle or high schools. In essence, the Corporation is seeking people with expertise in a variety of areas who can assess the quality of grant applications.

Reviewers should also be comfortable reading a large volume of material in a short period of time and providing a detailed evaluation and/or participating in small group discussions with others who have read the same applications.

Facilitators should have skills and experience facilitating or mediating small groups, as well as great organizational skills and the ability to work with others productively under pressure. Facilitators also need to be comfortable reading a large volume of material in a short period of time.

The Corporation's peer review process is a time-intensive and time-sensitive activity. Reviewers and Facilitators will typically need to devote at least 40 hours worth of their time to this activity over a period of 10 to 14 days.

## **What does the Corporation provide?**

All Reviewers and Facilitators, with the exception of Federal employees, are eligible to receive an honorarium (when an honorarium is available) for their participation in the grant review. For certain competitions, the Corporation may request for individuals to serve as Peer Reviewers on a voluntary basis. The honorarium is not intended to be a direct compensation for the service, time, and effort required for a review. Rather as an acknowledgement and appreciative offering for Reviewers and Facilitator's assistance in the review.

The Corporation conducts most of its peer reviews through our electronic eGrants system. Reviewers and Facilitators must be able to use the Corporation's system, receive and submit the necessary materials online.

## **What are other benefits of being a Peer Reviewer or Facilitator?**

Many participants in our Peer Review processes have felt that serving in a review is a professional development opportunity. Reviewers and Facilitators will be exposed to new and innovative ideas in the community and national service fields; in addition they are engaged in the grant-making process of a major funder of the service and volunteer sector while meeting and networking with other experts in their profession.

Participating in a review also helps to provide insight from another perspective on the requirements of writing string grant proposals, and can further develop grant writing skills.

### **Is there a deadline?**

The Corporation accepts Reviewer applications on a rolling basis. The sooner an application is submitted, the more likely it is to be selected for a review. However, because dozens of applications are submitted a week, please send a quick email to [PeerReviewers@cns.gov](mailto:PeerReviewers@cns.gov) to ensure a prompt review of the application. CNCS staff will review the application and determine if an applicant's experiences match the expertise needed for our reviews. If approved, the applicant will remain in the Corporation's database from which Reviewers/Facilitators are selected for each grant review.

### **If I work or serve in a Corporation-funded program or my organization is applying for Corporation funds, can I serve as a Reviewer or Facilitator?**

The Corporation is required to adhere to strict terms regarding Conflicts of Interest for all grant review processes to ensure a fair and unbiased review process. There are several guidelines and metrics used to determine if a Reviewer/Facilitator has a conflict of interest that will prevent him or her from participating in a specific review. For example, a Reviewer cannot serve in the same grant competition for which his or her organization is currently applying. However, a Reviewer/Facilitator could review applications from different grant competition. Please highlight any questions concerning a possible conflict of interest to CNCS staff at [PeerReviewers@cns.gov](mailto:PeerReviewers@cns.gov).

### **What happens next?**

To be considered as a Peer Reviewer or Facilitator, please complete the Peer Reviewer application in eGrants. Access <http://www.nationalservice.gov> and follow the eGrants link. If an applicant is selected, a staff member from the Corporation will contact the applicant via email and telephone to notify him or her of the specific details for a review and determine his or her availability to participate. At this time the Corporation has more potential reviewers in our database than review opportunities. If an applicant is contacted for a specific review, the first step is to confirm his or her time availability against the dates for the various competitions. It is important that a potential Reviewer periodically re-enter eGrants to keep contact information and experience current. This will aid in selecting potential Reviewers for the most appropriate review.

### **Who do I contact if I have a question?**

If there are additional questions about the Corporation for National & Community Service's Peer review opportunities, please send an email to [PeerReviewers@cns.gov](mailto:PeerReviewers@cns.gov).