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The Nation's Medical Research Agency

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Enhancing Peer Review Initiative Survey of Peer Reviewers



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INTRODUCTION

This survey of NIH peer reviewers is to help examine **NIH's Enhancing Peer Review Initiative** (<http://enhancing-peer-review.nih.gov>). The objectives of the initiative are to engage the best reviewers, improve the quality and transparency of peer review, and ensure balanced and fair reviews. This is the second "point in time" survey to gather reviewers' opinions about the peer review process. This information will be useful in assessing the changes introduced by the Enhancing Peer Review Initiative and may be used to further improve the peer review process.

You have been **randomly selected** to participate in this survey from a pool of individuals who served as peer reviewers for NIH at least once from May to November 2011. We are interested in the opinions of reviewers with different levels of peer review experience. Even if you have limited experience reviewing grant applications, **your opinions are very important to us.**

The survey should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. You can stop at any point and continue at another time. There are no right or wrong answers, so please give the answer that best describes your opinion. While we would like you to answer all the questions in this survey, you may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you choose to complete the survey, your responses will remain **anonymous**. Your responses will **not** be linked to your name and will **not** be made known to NIH staff or grant applicants. They will not be used to assess the performance of individual NIH Institutes, Centers, or Scientific Review Groups. Aggregate responses will be used to guide NIH management in refining enhancements to the peer review process.

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

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SECTION A: YOUR EXPERIENCES AS A PEER REVIEWER

1. In what capacity have you ever served as an NIH peer reviewer?

Select all that apply

- Regular "appointed" member of a chartered scientific review group (study section) who agrees to serve a fixed duration (typically 4-6 years); may also be called a "charter" or "permanent" member
- Ad hoc or "temporary" reviewer, who is an ad hoc member of a scientific review group (study section) or Special Emphasis Panel (SEP)

2. Are you currently serving as an appointed reviewer on a chartered scientific review group (study section) for NIH?

- Yes
- No

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3. As an appointed reviewer, how many full terms (typically 4 to 6 years each) have you completed for NIH?

- 0 terms
- 1 term
- 2 terms
- 3 terms
- 4 or more terms

4. For which component(s) of NIH have you ever served as either an appointed reviewer or as a temporary reviewer?

Select all that apply

- Center for Scientific Review (CSR)
- One or more NIH Institutes/Centers (ICs) (e.g., NCI, NIAID)

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5. On how many review meetings have you served as either an appointed reviewer or as a temporary reviewer for NIH from October 2010 to December 2011?

- 0 meetings
- 1 meeting
- 2 meetings
- 3 or more meetings

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6. To the best of your recollection, in which calendar years have you served as a peer reviewer for NIH, including all peer review service as either an appointed reviewer or as a temporary reviewer?

Select all that apply

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2011 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2000 - 2004 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2010 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1995 - 1999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2009 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1990 - 1994 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2008 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1985 - 1989 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2007 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1980 - 1984 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2006 | <input type="checkbox"/> 1975 - 1979 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2005 | <input type="checkbox"/> Before 1975 |

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SECTION B: REVIEW PROCESS AND PROCEDURES

The next question is about your most recent review experience since the shortened applications were introduced in January 2010. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement.

7. The information contained in grant applications is adequate for me to identify potential conflicts of interest in my assigned applications.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

8. Please indicate whether the post-submission materials policy has helped, had no effect, or hindered the fair and balanced review of applications for the following review criteria.

Select the answer that best describes your opinion for each of these:

	Helped	Had no effect	Hindered
Approach	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Investigator(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Please refer to this table when answering the following question.

Table 1. The NIH Scoring System Descriptors and Additional Guidance

Impact	Score	Descriptor	Additional Guidance on Strengths/Weaknesses
High	1	Exceptional	Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
	2	Outstanding	Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
	3	Excellent	Very strong with only some minor weaknesses
Medium	4	Very Good	Strong but with numerous minor weaknesses
	5	Good	Strong but with at least one moderate weakness
	6	Satisfactory	Some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses
Low	7	Fair	Some strengths but with at least one major weakness
	8	Marginal	A few strengths and a few major weaknesses
	9	Poor	Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses

Based on your most recent review experience, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement.

9. The 1 to 9 rating scale had sufficient range for me to communicate meaningful differences in the quality of the applications.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

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Please refer to this table when answering the following question.

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Low	7	Fair	Some strengths but with at least one major weakness
	8	Marginal	A few strengths and a few major weaknesses
	9	Poor	Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses

10. The Table of Scoring System Descriptors and Additional Guidance (Table 1) was useful to me for assigning criterion scores and preliminary overall impact scores in advance of the study section meeting.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

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Please refer to this table when answering the following question.

Table 1. The NIH Scoring System Descriptors and Additional Guidance

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	8	Marginal	A few strengths and a few major weaknesses
	9	Poor	Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses

11. The Table of Scoring System Descriptors and Additional Guidance (Table 1) was useful to me for assigning overall impact scores during the discussions of applications at the review group meeting.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

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Please refer to Table 2 when answering the following questions.

Table 2. Example of a Structured Critique Template

RPG/R01/R03/R15/R21 Review				
If you cannot access the hyperlinks below, visit http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/critiques/rpg.htm .				
Application #: 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 five 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 <i>Write a paragraph summarizing the factors that informed your Overall Impact score.</i>				
Scored Review Criteria Reviewers will consider each of the five review criteria below in the determination of scientific and technical merit, and give a separate score for each.				
1. Significance				
<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Strengths</td> </tr> <tr> <td>▪</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Weaknesses</td> </tr> <tr> <td>▪</td> </tr> </table>	Strengths	▪	Weaknesses	▪
Strengths				
▪				
Weaknesses				
▪				

Based on your most recent review experience using the structured critique templates (an example is shown here), please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement.

B12. The structured critique templates allowed me to fully describe my evaluations of the applications.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

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Based on your most recent review experience using the structured critique templates, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement.

13. The bulleted format in the structured critique templates was adequate for capturing the strengths and weaknesses of the applications.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

Based on your most recent review experience involving not discussed (ND) applications, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

14. The narrative overall impact statement in the structured critique template helped me communicate how the five scorable review criteria contributed to the overall impact score assigned to applications.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

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15. The narrative overall impact statement in the structured critique template helped me communicate to the applicants why their applications were not discussed.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

16. The criterion scores helped me communicate to the applicants why their applications were not discussed.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

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B17. The following question refers to all shortened realigned applications.

Since the shortened applications were introduced in January 2010, to what extent do you agree or disagree that each of the following application sections is sufficient to evaluate the scientific merit of most research grant applications?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
Specific Aims	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Biographical Sketch	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Introduction to Revised Application	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Research Strategy for basic research applications	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Research Strategy for clinical research applications	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Literature Cited	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Appendices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Based on your most recent review experience, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

18. My scientific expertise was necessary and appropriately used in the review process.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

19. The other review group members seemed to be experts in their fields.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

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20. The format and duration of the discussions were sufficient for reviewers not assigned to evaluate an application to be able to cast well-informed votes.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

21. An appropriate amount of time was spent discussing the potential impact of the applicants' research.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

22. During your most recent review experience, to what extent do you agree or disagree that reviewers were provided with appropriate review guidelines, criteria, and instructions to review the specific applications assigned to them?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

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23. How well did the reviewer orientation and any training materials you received prepare you to review the shortened, realigned grant applications introduced in January 2010?

- Very well
- Somewhat well
- Not well at all

24. During your most recent review experience, to what extent do you agree or disagree that reviewers clearly understood the distinction between the review criteria Significance and Overall Impact?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Not applicable

25. Is there any aspect of the NIH peer review process for which better instructions, orientation materials, or review guidelines are needed? Please specify in the space provided. (150 chars)

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26. During and after the study section meeting, reviewers are given the opportunity to update and finalize their critiques and criterion scores. Which of the following accommodations would/do you find most helpful to facilitate updating your critiques and criterion scores?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all important	Not sure/ not applicable
Internet access during the meeting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A reminder from the SRO after the meeting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The option to email updated critiques and criterion scores directly to the SRO	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sufficient time after the meeting to post updated materials	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

27. Since January of 2011, NIH's grants policy allows **submission of a single amendment** for all NIH grant applications. The purpose of the change is to enable NIH to fund high quality applications earlier, with fewer resubmissions.

In your opinion, has the single resubmission policy helped, had no effect, or hindered the NIH peer review process?

- Helped
- Had no effect
- Hindered
- Don't Know

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B27a. How has the single resubmission policy helped NIH's peer review process? (300 char)

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B27a. How has the single resubmission policy hindered NIH's peer review process? (300 char)

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SECTION C: YOUR OPINIONS ABOUT THE NIH PEER REVIEW PROCESS

When answering the questions in this section, please think of the current peer review process at NIH, the one under which your most recent peer review service occurred.

28. Overall, which peer review system do you prefer - the new system (including ALL changes made to date from the **Enhancing Peer Review Initiative**) or the old system (without ANY of the changes from the **Enhancing Peer Review Initiative**)?

- New System
- Old System
- No preference between the new or the old systems
- Not applicable – no experience with old system

29. Since the shortened applications were introduced in January 2010, how fair is the peer review process at NIH?

- Very fair
- Somewhat fair
- Neither fair nor unfair
- Somewhat unfair
- Very unfair

30. Since the shortened applications were introduced in January 2010, how satisfied are you with the peer review process at NIH?

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

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SECTION D: PEER REVIEW SERVICE

31. Below are four aspects of the peer review process that may affect individuals' willingness to serve as *ad hoc* or "temporary" reviewers. Please rate the importance to which each of the following effects your willingness to serve in the future as an *ad hoc* reviewer.

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all important	Not sure/ not applicable
The time commitment required to prepare for the meeting (read, assess, and critique applications)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The time commitment required to travel to and from review meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The time commitment required to attend review meetings/discussions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The availability of remote meeting formats, such as telepresence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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32. Below are five aspects of the peer review process that may affect individuals' willingness to serve as regular or "appointed" members of a chartered scientific review group (study section). Please rate the importance to which each of the following affects your willingness to serve in the future as a regular reviewer.

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all important	Not sure/ not applicable
The requirement for a multi-year commitment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The availability of flexible terms of service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The time commitment required to prepare for the meeting (read, assess, and critique applications)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The time commitment required to attend review meetings/discussions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The availability of periodic meetings in Chicago or on the west coast	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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SECTION E BACKGROUND

As a reminder, the information you provide in this survey will remain anonymous. No individual respondents will be identified, and all responses will be summarized and reported in aggregate form.

33. What type of organization do you work for?

Select all that apply.

- Institution of higher education (including a university foundation)
- Hospital/medical center (including teaching hospitals)
- Independent research foundation or other non-profit institution
- Private sector/for-profit organization (including small business)
- Federal, State, or Local Government agency
- Other

Specify (150 chars):

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34. What is your job title or position?

- Professor or equivalent rank
- Associate Professor or equivalent rank
- Assistant Professor or equivalent rank
- Other

Specify (40 chars):

35. Have you ever submitted a research grant application to NIH as a **Principal Investigator (PI) for a single-PI or multiple-PI grant?**

- Yes
- No

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36. When did you submit your first research grant application to NIH as a PI for a single-PI or multiple-PI grant?

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> 2010-2011 | <input type="radio"/> 1996-1998 |
| <input type="radio"/> 2008-2009 | <input type="radio"/> 1993-1995 |
| <input type="radio"/> 2005-2007 | <input type="radio"/> 1990-1992 |
| <input type="radio"/> 2002-2004 | <input type="radio"/> Prior to 1990 |
| <input type="radio"/> 1999-2001 | |

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37. In which of the following fiscal years did you receive any type of NIH funding as a PI? (Please include single-PI grants and multiple-PI grants.)

Examples of NIH funding include research grants (R series), program project/center grants (P series), cooperative agreements, career development awards (K series), research training and fellowships (T and F series), and SBIR/STTR grants and contracts.

Select all that apply

- FY 2009 (October 2008 to September 2009)
- FY 2008 (October 2007 to September 2008)
- FY 2007 (October 2006 to September 2007)
- Did not receive NIH funding for the fiscal years listed

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38. Please indicate the degree(s) you have.

Select all that apply

- Ph.D. or other research doctorate
- M.D.
- D.D.S.
- D.V.M. or V.M.D.
- Other

Specify (150 chars):

39. What is your age?

- Under 35
- 35 - 40
- 41 - 45
- 46 - 50
- 51 - 55
- 56 - 60
- 61 - 65
- 66 - 70
- Over 70

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40. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

41. What is your ethnicity?

- Hispanic or Latino
- Not Hispanic or Latino

42. What is your race?

Select all that apply

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White

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Thank you very much for responding to the survey!

For more information about the peer review changes that have been implemented at NIH, please visit <http://enhancing-peer-review.nih.gov/faqs.html>.

If you have any ideas for improving the peer review process at NIH, please enter your suggestions here:

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