SUPPORTING STATEMENT - PART A for

OMB Control Number 0518-0028:

Peer Review-Related Forms for the Office of Scientific Quality Review

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A1. Circumstances that make the collection of information necessary.

Identify any legal or administrative requirements that necessitate the collection. Attach a copy of the appropriate section of each statute and regulation mandating or authorizing the collection of information.

The Office of Scientific Quality Review (OSQR) requests a reinstatement. The Office of Scientific Quality Review (OSQR) oversees peer review of the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) research plans in response to Congressional mandate in The Agricultural Research Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (Public Law 105-185, Section 103d).

The ARS peer-review panels are comprised of scientists who review current scientific research projects and who have expert knowledge in the fields being reviewed. Peer review panels provide in-depth evaluation of project plans. Panels typically review 2 to 5 project plans by online discussion. The OSQR oversees the process of panel member selection, their personal documentation and certification for review, and the recording, and transmittal of panel reviews. .

A2. Purpose and Use of the Information.

Indicate how, by whom, and for what purpose the information is to be used. Except for a new collection, indicate how the agency has actually used the information received from the current collection.

Respondents are not required to maintain copies of any of the subject forms. ARS's recordkeeping requirements are a composite of:

44 USC Chapters 21, 29, 31, and 33, Federal Records Act
18 USC Chapter 101 Records and Reports-§2071, Concealment, removal, or mutilation generally
5 USC Chapter 552, Freedom of Information Act Regulated in Code of Federal Regulations: 36 CFR, Chapter 12, Subchapter B, Records Management
Further defined in Departmental Regulations:
- DR 3080-1 Records Disposition
- DR 3040-1 Electronic Records Management Program
- DR 3040-2 Call Detail Records
- DR 3090-1 Vital Records Program

Each of these laws, regulations, and Departmental manuals pertain to the use of forms to organize the data collected by OSQR. All data are held for at least seven (7) years within the OSQR office with the exception of the OSQR Information Form, which contains Personally Identifiable information, and is, therefore, retained in accordance with SORN OCFO/NFC. The following describes the forms and the rationale for collecting the information.

2a. Peer Review Forms

These document the comments and recommendations of scientists reviewing ARS's project plans. Two processes, *ad hoc* review and panel review, require similar documentation. Ad hoc reviewers typically provide their reviews by email. Panel reviewers write reviews in advance and then these are used to produce a single panel consensus review for each plan, as part of either an online (web-based) or in-person meeting. On occasion several *Ad hoc* reviewers may meet to examine a group of plans. These, too, use their initial reviews to produce a consensus review. Typically, if needed, an *Ad* hoc meeting is conducted online using a commercial (WebEx Productivity Tool) web conferencing application.

ARS-199A Ad Hoc Review of ARS Research Project

This form contains space for *ad hoc* reviewers providing only written comments to record their evaluation of plans using three criteria described therein. A fourth section allows for additional comments. The form lists the five Action Classes that provide an overall rating of the plan. The reviewer must select one of these. About 25 projects are reviewed by the *ad hoc* process each year, with, typically, two to three reviews for each project. Rarely an individual asked to submit an *ad hoc* review of more than one plan in a year.

ARS-223P Panel Recommendation for ARS Research Project Plan

The Panel Recommendation Form represents the consensus review of the group of reviewers and is based on the comments in ARS-225P received from Primary and Secondary reviewers. This form is completed for about 175 projects annually in electronic form. For online panels the form is competed by the OSQR using completed ARS-225P and ARS-231 forms and then deliberated during the online panel review by panelists. This form does not have an Action Class rating section.

ARS-225P Panelist Peer Review of ARS Research Project

Similar to ARS-223P, this form is used by individual Primary (lead) and Secondary reviewers assigned to each plan to record their comments with regard to assessment of the plan along stated criteria. Space also is available for additional comment. This form is completed prior to the panel meeting and submitted to OSQR via electronic mail about 400 times per year.

ARS-231, Reviewer Comment Form

This form provides an opportunity for panelists to comment briefly on plans for which they do not have primary or secondary reviewer responsibility. Panelists are encouraged to complete this form especially when they feel that there are comments that should be considered by the ARS research scientists.

2b. Records on Peer Reviewers

These are forms used to document information about *ad hoc* and panel reviewers and panel chairs. All reviewers and chairs complete the confidentiality agreement. Those traveling complete the expense form and those receiving honoraria must provide that form.

ARS-200-PA OSQR Confidentiality Agreement and Conflict of Interest (COI)

This form contains a written explanation of each reviewer's agreement to keep the information in ARS's project plans confidential. We maintain the original copy. Edits and revisions were made to include COI

ARS-202 P OSQR Information Form (formerly Chair and Panelist Information)
The OSQR Information Form is an important customer service tool for OSQR. It is collected from about 200 panelists and chair each year.

ARS-209-P OSQR Expense Report
The Expense Report serves as documentation for approving peer reviewers for reimbursement of their travel and lodging expenses (as appropriate). The report contains space for detailing personal funds spent to travel to and from local airports, lodging, dates, and other information. Reviewers or other participants eligible to receive expense reimbursement must submit one or both of these forms, totaling not more than 30 submissions annually.

A3. Use of information technology and burden reduction.

Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology, e.g., permitting electronic submission of responses, and the basis for the decision for adopting this means of collection. Also describe any consideration of using information technology to reduce burden.

ARS makes every effort to comply with the E-Government Act, 2002 (E-Gov) and to provide for alternative submission of information collections. Forms are transmitted between The OSQR and respondents via email. Currently there are no plans to created and launch a web-based system for respondents to submit data requirements electronically.

A4. Efforts to identify duplication.

Describe efforts to identify duplication. Show specifically why any similar information already available cannot be used or modified for use for the purposes described in Question 2.

Every effort has been made to avoid duplication. There is similar data collected; however, those do not meet the agency's need. To ensure program integrity, in response to Congress, ARS solely oversees and administers peer review of the agency's research plans. The information required for *data collection* is not currently reported to any other agency on a regular basis in a standardized form.

A5. Impacts on small businesses or other small entities.

If the collection of information impacts small businesses or other small entities (Item 5 of

OMB Form 83-I), describe any methods used to minimize burden.

No small businesses. Nearly all reviewers are employed by Federal, state, national governments, universities, or large corporations.

A6. Consequences of collecting the information less frequently.

Describe the consequence to Federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted, or is conducted less frequently, as well as any technical or legal obstacles to reducing burden.

This is an ongoing mandatory data collection. Each of these forms are used to fulfill the administrative requirements of the ARS Peer Review Process as mandated by Public Law 105-185; Section 103(d). Without the forms, especially the peer review and action class forms, the intent of the legislation would not be met.

The Confidentiality Agreement serves as a communication tool between ARS and reviewers so that privacy of the review is to be maintained. Without such an agreement, ARS would risk illegal and unwanted use or abuse of ARS's patented or potentially patented research techniques and products.

The OSQR Information Form assists OSQR in properly submitting their honorarium. Without the information on such forms, the office might be in violation of documentation requirements for such transactions or fail to provide good partnership with our partners and stakeholders.

A7. Special circumstances relating to the Guidelines of 5 CFR 1320.5.

Explain any special circumstances that would cause an information collection to be conducted in a manner:

- **Requiring respondents to report information to the agency more often than quarterly;**

- **Requiring respondents to prepare a written response to a collection of information in fewer than 30 days after receipt of it;**

  All the Records on Peer Reviewers (2b above) forms and the Action Class Judgment Form requires a response in fewer than 30 days. The peer review documentation and information about the reviewers themselves is managed by a master schedule to obtain peer reviews of research at fixed intervals. Review comment forms are typically provided six (6) to ten (10) weeks before they must be returned.

- **Requiring respondents to submit more than an original and two copies of any document;**

- **Requiring respondents to retain records, other than health, medical, government contract, grant-in-aid, or tax records for more than three years;**

- **In connection with a statistical survey, that is not designed to produce valid and reliable results that can be generalized to the universe of study;**

- **Requiring the use of a statistical data classification that has not been reviewed and approved by OMB;**

- **That includes a pledge of confidentiality that is not supported by authority established in statute or regulation, that is not supported by disclosure and data security policies that are consistent with the pledge, or which unnecessarily impedes sharing of data with other agencies for compatible confidential use;**

  The pledge of confidentiality required in the Confidentiality Agreement (ARS-200PA) is in conjunction with intellectual property rights laws governing ARS's research. No peer reviewer may expose or use knowledge gained because of the peer review for their own or their employer's benefit or in unethical behavior in the ownership of scientific techniques or data.

- **or Requiring respondents to submit proprietary trade secret, or other confidential information unless the agency can demonstrate that it has instituted procedures to protect the information's confidentiality to the extent permitted by law.**

  OSQR's respondents do not submit proprietary trade secrets or other confidential information other than:

  The Expense, and OSQR Information Forms include Social Security numbers and, for the latter, banking information. OSQR retains these in paper form only and does not electronically store forms containing Social Security Numbers.

  As required by ARS policy, reviewers of particular projects are anonymous to foster unbiased criticism of ARS's research. Forms containing the reviewers' names are held confidential to the OSQR.

  Panel review forms commonly contain sensitive information, such as the nature of patent or patentable research techniques or products and critiques of an employee's performance as a researcher.

  There are no other special circumstances. The collection of information is conducted in a manner consistent with the guidelines in 5 CFR 1320.5.

A8. Comments to the Federal Register Notice and efforts for consultation.

If applicable, provide a copy and identify the date and page number of publication in the Federal Register of the agency's notice, required by 5 CFR 1320.8 (d), soliciting comments on the information collection prior to submission to OMB. Summarize public comments received in response to that notice and describe actions taken by the agency in response to these comments. Specifically address comments received on cost and hour burden.

Describe efforts to consult with persons outside the agency to obtain their views on the availability of data, frequency of collection, the clarity of instructions and recordkeeping, disclosure, or reporting format (if any), and on the data elements to be recorded, disclosed, or reported.

Consultation with representatives of those from whom information is to be obtained or those who must compile records should occur at least once every 3 years even if the collection of information activity is the same as in prior years. There may be circumstances that may preclude consultation in a specific situation. These circumstances should be explained.

OSQR holds a debriefing at the end of each review panel and asks reviewers to comment on the process and to make suggestions for improvement. The following reviewers were asked to provide feedback on our data collection processes.

Cristina Rosa, Ph.D. Professor,
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1) Did the forms seem appropriate relative to your assignment as a Reviewer?
Rosa: Yes, the forms gave me an opportunity to supply technical review for each objective and to provide feedback for improvement, as well as to review of general plan, hypothesis and plan presentation. I particularly appreciated that the forms were prepopulated with the specific objectives for each proposal, this made the review process easier for me. Collecting input on the probability of completing the project successfully should also result in useful feedback.
Lieurance: Yes
Szucs: YES
Park: Yes, the forms were appropriate

2) Was there any information that was irrelevant or anything we should have asked but did not?
C. Rosa: While the question about the investigator's knowledge related to the project prompted the investigators to add some useful background for me as reviewer, I am wondering if testing this makes sense for teams of scientists with such long experience and expertise.
D. Lieurance: Nope.
M. Szucs: NO, the information provided was relevant and sufficient to conduct the reviews.
I. Park: No, there was no irrelevant information.

3) Was the time it took to complete the forms and review the panels appropriate, or did it feel mundane?
C. Rosa: Yes, the time to complete the forms was appropriate and the forms were useful for continuing the panel discussion, since the most important points were included in them.
D. Lieurance: It was not a burden, and the forms were easy to complete.
M. Szucs: It was appropriate.
I. Park: It was sufficient.

4) Did you feel comfortable providing personal information and did you feel safe in the belief it would be protected?
C. Rosa: I generally don't feel comfortable providing personal information, since the government is changing the level of protection in many federal agencies and processes.
D. Lieurance: Yes and Yes.
M. Szucs: Personal information was provided to receive the honorarium payment. It felt standard procedure to provide that personal information.
I. Park: I feel comfortable providing personal information because it is directly related to the USDA National Program. I also felt safe, "in the belief it would be protected."

5) Is there a better way to gather this information? Do you feel it was necessary?

C. Rosa: I am wondering if it is necessary to provide personal information and why.
D. Lieurance: You could consider something like a Google form, although I do know you all have restrictions on Google products.
M. Szucs: The NSF website allows this information to be input online on a secure website. It seems safer than mailing pdf documents with the same information.
I. Park: This seems efficient.

6) Do you have any suggestions on what we could do to improve how we collect your information or receive your feedback as a reviewer?
C. Rosa: Maybe avoid asking for information about place and date of birth, I don't see how they are needed.
D. Lieurance: You could consider something like a Google form, although I do know you all have restrictions on Google products.
M. Szucs: An online submission system like that of NSF would be preferred.
I. Park: No suggestions. Thank you very much.

A9. Explain any decisions to provide any payment or gift to respondents.

Explain any decision to provide any payment or gift to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.

Justification for Providing Honorariums

Panel reviewers are considered subject matter experts and senior researchers with busy schedules. OSQR depends upon their professional expertise to prepare thoughtful and substantive peer reviews. Each review consists of 2-5 project plans (30-40 pages) wherein the reviewers make recommendations regarding the proposal and comment on the feasibility and significance of the plan. Each panelist will review the plan on their own and make notes. The panel meeting itself lasts several hours as the reviewers share their observations, deliberate, and document their questions and recommendations. These individuals are sought by ARS and other scientific organizations for their expert advice and the value their input adds to ARS research activities. To reflect the Agency's appreciation, and to enhance the likelihood that they will agree to serve, an honorarium of ($200), , is offered.

A10. Assurances of confidentiality provided to respondents.

Describe any assurance of confidentiality provided to respondents and the basis for the assurance in statute, regulation, or agency policy.

Justification for Limited Public Access to the Information Contained in these forms:

The OSQR Information Form includes Social Security Numbers and personal banking information. These numbers are retained only in paper form in a locked file. They are not stored electronically within the OSQR (They may, however, be retained electronically by other offices in the Department which would request them for travel arrangement and reimbursement, or

payment of honoraria).

As required by ARS policy, and to foster honest and candid comment, reviewers of particular plans are anonymous. Forms identifying reviewers and/or their review assignments are held confidential to the OSQR. Review comments and Action Class Judgment forms identify individual reviewers only by an alphanumeric code with the identity of individuals for these codes known only to OSQR staff.

Panel review forms and project plans may contain sensitive information, such as the nature of patent or patentable research techniques or products or critiques of an employee's performance as a researcher. They are not publicly available.

PEER Review Form ARS-202P contains required PII information, and sensitive data. The information is under SORN OCFO/NFC, Nicole Young, Privacy Officer, ARS, 10-6-2026.

A11. Justification for any questions of a sensitive nature.

Provide additional justification for any questions of a sensitive nature, such as sexual behavior or attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private. This justification should include the reasons why the agency considers the questions necessary, the specific uses to be made of the information, the explanation to be given to persons from whom the information is requested, and any steps to be taken to obtain their consent.

No sensitive personal information is collected, such as sexual orientation or religious beliefs.

A12. Estimates of the hour burden of the collection of information.

Provide estimates of the hour burden of the collection of information. Indicate the number of respondents, frequency of response, annual hour burden, and an explanation of how the burden was estimated.

A. Indicate the number of respondents, frequency of response, annual hour burden, and an explanation of how the burden was estimated. If this request for approval covers more than one form, provide separate hour burden estimates for each form and aggregate the hour burdens in Item 13 of OMB Form 83-I.

The estimated annual burden is 185 respondents (individuals/households); 763 annual burden hours and 1,665 total annual response.

The burden hours for the forms for peer review are based on prior experience, including report from actual respondents. The attached data burden statement represents the burden hours for each form. Because respondents are spread throughout the U.S. The cost is based on the annual salary of $126,384 at a pay rate of $60.56 per hour (2026 GS-15, Step 1 base).

B. Provide estimates of annualized cost to respondents for the hour burdens for collections of information, identifying and using appropriate wage rate categories.

The total estimated cost to respondents is the loaded wage rate X total hours = $247,801.96 loaded wages.

To account for fringe benefits, we used the Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) (2025). Fringe markup is from the following BLS release: Employer Costs for Employee Compensation news release text; For release 10:00 am (EDT) Friday, March 20, 2026 (https://www.bls.gov/news.release/ecec.nr0.htm). BLS reported that for civilian workers, fringe benefits accounted for 31.4 percent of total compensation and wages accounted for the remaining 68.6 percent. To calculate the loaded hourly wage for each participant, we divided the mean hourly wage by 68.8 percent. Accordingly, the loaded wage rate is $60.56/.686 = $88.28

A13. Estimates of other total annual cost burden.

Provide estimates of the total annual cost burden to respondents or recordkeepers resulting from the collection of information, (do not include the cost of any hour burden shown in questions 12 and 14). The cost estimates should be split into two components: (a) a total capital and start-up cost component annualized over its expected useful life; and (b) a total operation and maintenance and purchase of services component.

No capital or startup costs, no ongoing operation or maintenance cost of services. No respondents are required to purchase items to complete the forms.

A14. Provide estimates of annualized cost to the Federal government.

Provide estimates of annualized cost to the Federal government. Provide a description of the method used to estimate cost and any other expense that would not have been incurred without this collection of information.

The total government cost is $318,500.00.

The forms outlined are integral to the functioning of the activities of the office and form the key mission. The information gathered is used by all OSQR employees in conduct of the office's regular day-to-day business. The OSQR annual cost to the Federal Government is based on the average annual salary of $111,087 at a pay rate of $53.23 per hour (2026 GS-11, 10 with DCB locality adjustment). The total cost with 42.6% fringe benefits is $92.73 and the total annual hour burden of 2087 hours is $193,538.00.

A15. Explanation of program changes or adjustments.

Explain the reasons for any program changes or adjustments reported in Items 13 or 14 of the OMB Form 83-I.

This is a reinstatement request. The previously approved burden inventory was 1,600 respondents, 1,600 total annual responses and 2,833 total annual burden hours. The number of respondents decreased from 1,600 to 185; the number of responses decreased from 1,600 to 185. The number of burden hours decreased from 2,833 to 763, due to adjustments of 2,070. The decrease in burden hours is due to a smaller number of people who will fill out the forms.

A16. Plans for tabulation, and publication and project time schedule.

For collections of information whose results are planned to be published, outline plans for tabulation and publication.

Results will not be tabulated or published. Data collected will be used for internal administration use.

None of the specific contents of these forms are to be published for public use. The OSQR records the results of all peer reviews as a matter of ARS records.

A17. Displaying the OMB Approval Expiration Date.

If seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons that display would be inappropriate.

The expiration date will be displayed on the forms.

A18. Exceptions to the certification statement identified in Item 19.

Explain each exception to the certification statement identified in Item 19 of the OMB 83-I" Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act."

There are no exceptions. None of the collected information is associated with or designed to employ statistical methods.