Supporting Statement A for

Early Career Reviewer Program Application and Vetting System (EAVS)
National Institutes of Health
Center for Scientific Review (CSR)

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Check off which applies:

- New
- X Revision
- Reinstatement with Change
- Reinstatement without Change
- Extension
- Emergency
- Existing w/o OMB approval

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Table of Contents

A. ABSTRACT....4
A.1 Circumstances Making the Collection of Information Necessary....4
A.2. Purpose and Use of the Information Collection....4
A.3 Use of Information Technology and Burden Reduction....5
A.4 Efforts to Identify Duplication and Use of Similar Information....6
A.5 Impact on Small Businesses or Other Small Entities....6
A.6 Consequences of Collecting the Information Less Frequently....6
A.7 Special Circumstances Relating to the Guidelines of 5 CFR 1320.5....7
A.8 Comments in Response to the Federal Register Notice and Efforts to Consult Outside 7
A.9 Explanation of Any Payment of Gift to Respondents....7
A.10 Assurance of Confidentiality Provided to Respondents....7
A.11 Justification for Sensitive Questions....7
A.12 Estimates of Hour Burden Including Annualized Hourly Costs....8
A.13 Estimate of Other Total Annual Cost Burden to Respondents or Record keepers....9
A.14 Annualized Cost to the Federal Government....9
A.15 Explanation for Program Changes or Adjustments....9
A.16 Plans for Tabulation and Publication and Project Time Schedule....9
A.17 Reason(s) Display of OMB Expiration Date is Inappropriate....9
A.18 Exceptions to Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act Submissions 10

LIST OF ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Screenshots of Online Application
Attachment 2: Sample Letters to Applicants
Attachment 3: ECR Website - www.csr.nih.gov/ECR
Attachment 4: Privacy Memo
Attachment 5: Privacy Impact Assessment
Attachment 6: 60-day Comment Tracking Log

Abstract

This information collection request (ICR) is to revise the *ECR Application and Vetting System* (ECR EAVS) software by adding two questions to the application and to increase the burden hours to account for the increase in the number of applications to the program over the last three years. This revision is seeking another three years of data collection via the ECR EAVS software.

The Center for Scientific Review (CSR) is the portal for NIH research grant applications and their review for scientific merit. Our mission is to see that NIH grant applications receive fair, independent, expert, and timely reviews – free from inappropriate influences – so NIH can fund the most promising research. To accomplish this goal, Scientific Review Officers (SRO) form review panels consisting of scientists who have the technical and scientific expertise to evaluate the merit of grant applications.

The CSR Early Career Reviewer (ECR) program was developed to identify and train qualified scientists who are early in their scientific careers and who have not had prior CSR review experience. Currently, the ECR EAVS online application software, is accessed by ECR program applicants who provide their names, contact information, a description of their areas of expertise, and their professional CV. An online application system is more cost-effective and efficient than transmitting information between applicants and ECR staff by mail. The information from *EAVS* is transmitted to SROs who vet the applications to determine if reviewers are an appropriate fit for their review panels.

A.1 Circumstances Making the Collection of Information Necessary

NIH Center for Scientific Review: Overview

The Center for Scientific Review (CSR) is the portal for NIH grant applications and their review for scientific merit. We receive all research grant applications sent to NIH and handle the review of all grants. We organize approximately 1,300 review meetings each year and engage over 25,000 reviewers to evaluate the research grant applications—so NIH can fund the most promising research.

To accomplish this goal, Scientific Review Officers (SRO) form review panels consisting of scientists who have the technical and scientific expertise to evaluate the merit of grant applications. Potential reviewers are identified by SROs by canvassing the scientific literature, outreach at national scientific meetings, review of successfully funded applications, and by referral from other scientists**. The legislative authority to collect information from potential reviewers to determine their appropriateness to serve on grant application review panels is 42 USC Section 241: Research and Investigations General.**

A.2 Purpose and Use of the Information Collection

ECR Application and Vetting System (EAVS) Application

This is a Revision application. The primary purpose of this ICR is to continue to gather information from ECR program applicants via an online application in a systematic way that reduces burden on the applicants and governmental costs associated with processing. Since the initiation of the OMB approved Early Career Reviewer Application and Vetting

System (EAVS), we have received more than 18,895 registrations to use the system and more than 17,924 applications. ECR applicant information is provided for the purpose of evaluating their qualifications to serve on review panels at CSR. Information gathered to determine eligibility will include the ECR applicants' names and institutions, areas of expertise, training credentials, professional accomplishments, email addresses, and NIH Commons names, most of which is provided in their CVs (see Attachment 1: Screen Shots of Online Application Format). Applicants will continue to be asked to select up to four study sections that match their areas of expertise. This information will be used to help SROs identify applicants that are appropriate matches for their review panels. The provision of a Commons ID allows staff members to more easily add selected ECRs to study section rosters via NIH data systems (IMPACII). The ECR website (Attachment 3) provides a link to the EAVS online application. The application software was developed by the CSR's IT Services and Solutions (ITSS) in collaboration with CSR ECR staff for use by ECR applicants and for CSR SROs.

Aside from using the information to identify reviewers for review panels, the information is also being used to help with ongoing program evaluation and to improve current processes (e.g., communication and outreach efforts). For example, in the last three years there has been a 12% increase in the number of ECR applications received. We currently receive, on average, around 124 applications per month. The high interest in the program and continued application growth has led CSR to now require two ECRs on every standing review panel, per the recommendation of the *CSR Advisory Council Early Career Reviewer Working Grou*p. Although this type of information is not a systematic investigation and will not produce any generalizable results, it has helped the ECR working group make recommendations to enhance the strengths and minimize the weakness of the program. The information collected also highlighted the need to develop clear strategies and techniques to address the pool of ECR applicants being significantly larger than the availability of opportunities to serve as a reviewer.

A revision of our OMB clearance is being sought to continue our use of the software with the request to add two questions to gather data on applicants' publication record. Data captured from these questions will be used to help determine program eligibility more easily and will reduce the number of false rejections from the program. In turn, this will save time and reduce the burden on both applicants and program staff.

A.3 Use of Information Technology and Burden Reduction

ECR Application and Vetting System (EAVS) - Burden for Applicants

EAVS allows applicants to access an application form through our ECR website and provide all the information needed for vetting the applicant for inclusion in the ECR program. This has reduced burden on the applicant and is more efficient and cost-effective for CSR. This online system reduces staff time to process applications and increases the speed of transmission of applications for the ECR program to SROs who are in the best position to evaluate applicants' appropriateness to serve as reviewers. It also allows for seamless provision of feedback to applicants regarding their eligibility and places those accepted into a pool of applicants who will be invited to participate in future study sections. Letters are sent via email to applicants informing them of their acceptance

in the ECR program or providing them with feedback as to why they did not qualify (see Attachment 2: Sample Letters to Applicants). The latter group is encouraged to strengthen their CV and reapply at a later date. Attachment 1 provides screenshots of EAVS. Completion of the online application should take no longer than 25 minutes per applicant.

Privacy Impact Assessment

A Privacy Impact Assessment was completed for the NIH CSR Early Career Reviewers Database (see Attachment 5). This is renewed annually. The most recent PIA is for the continued maintenance of the database of applicants for the ECR program. The online application software directs information into the NIH CSR Early Career Reviewers Database. It was determined by the CSR Privacy Officer that a Confidentiality Agreement would not be necessary for this proposed project. The existing protections afforded to all reviewers who serve on committees apply to applicants for the ECR program. See Attachment 4: Privacy Memo.

A.4 Efforts to Identify Duplication and Use of Similar Information

Most of the information that is gathered through the EAVS application is not available from any other source or agency. Some of the eligibility information gleaned from applicants' CVs might also be available through university websites, IMPACII, social media sites, professional association websites or via telephone or email contact with the applicant. These sources are used inconsistently by applicants and may include outdated or incomplete information, all of which introduce the potential for inconsistency in the manner in which applicants are evaluated.

A.5 Impact on Small Businesses or Other Small Entities

Researchers from small organizations are eligible to apply for the ECR program using EAVS. The time estimated for completion of the online application is the same for all applicants, including those from small businesses.

A.6 Consequences of Collecting the Information Less Frequently

Frequency of Application

Applicants for the ECR program complete the application and upload their CVs only once after selecting the "Apply for the ECR Program" option in EAVS. Applicants who do not meet the minimum requirements for inclusion in the ECR program are provided with feedback on why they were not accepted. All of those not accepted have the option to reapply after they have had time to strengthen their qualifications. Reapplication can occur at any time and consists of repeating the original application steps. Applicants can apply more than twice if needed. It is possible that those accepted into the ECR program will change jobs and/or contact information during their time of participation in the ECR program. These individuals can update their information using the same online application by selecting the "update your information" option (see Attachment 1). Annual queries will be made to those who are eligible, but not yet recruited to a panel, to determine continued interest in the ECR program. If the response is in the negative or no response is received, their information will be archived or removed from the database.

Consequence of not collecting applicant information

As described in Section A.4, some of the eligibility information gleaned from applicants' CVs might also be available through other sources, but these sources are used inconsistently by applicants and may include outdated or incomplete information— all of which introduce the potential for inconsistency in the manner in which applicants are evaluated. Completing the online application and uploading a CV standardizes the process and helps ensure that all applicants are evaluated based on the same criteria. The online application and CV also greatly reduce staff time that would be needed to conduct detailed online searches for information on each applicant. Given the high volume of applicants, it is more cost-effective to ask applicants to provide their CVs and other information (e.g., degrees, training, study section preferences) than to hire staff to conduct individualized online searches to verify the qualifications of each applicant. It also prevents the problem of misidentifying information online as belonging to applicants when it may belong to another person with a similar name. Finally, providing all information at the time of application reduces the number of times that CSR staff will have to contact the applicant to verify or request additional information.

A.7 Special Circumstances Relating to the Guidelines of 5 CFR 1320.5

The ECR Application and Vetting System (EAVS) fully complies with all guidelines stated in 5 CFR 1320.5.

A.8.1 Comments in Response to the Federal Register Notice

March 5, 2026, Volume 91, Number 43, Pages 10812-10813. There were two public comments in response to this Federal Register Notice (See Attachment 6).

A.8.2 Efforts to Consult Outside Agency

There were no consultations with any outside agencies.

A.9 Explanation of Any Payment of Gift to Respondents

Participation in the ECR program is voluntary. No compensation is provided for applying to the program. Those selected to be part of the ECR program have the opportunity to serve on review panels. All reviewers on study sections are paid an honorarium for their reviews. No additional compensation is paid to ECRs.

A.10 Assurance of Confidentiality Provided to Respondents

System of Record

The IT system in which information is stored is titled the NIH CSR Early Career Reviewers Database. The system was assessed with a Privacy Impact Assessment. The date of the completion of the PIA was 08/28/2024. The Privacy Act applies to this activity. The number of the Privacy Act Systems of Record Notice that covers the information collection is 09-25-0036 "NIH Extramural Awards and Chartered Advisory Committee (IMPAC II), Contract Information (DCIS), and Cooperative Agreement Information, HHS/NIH." The date of publication in the Federal Register was September 26, 2002 (see Attachment 4).

A.11 Justification for Sensitive Questions

No sensitive questions are included in the application. Applicants' CVs will continue to be collected as part of the online application. While the CV typically contains only academic achievements and credentials, it is possible for applicants to include sensitive information in their CVs. All CVs are stored in a password protected shared filed that is only accessible by ECR Program Staff and SROs at CSR.

A.12.1 Estimates of Hour Burden Including Annualized Hourly Costs

Annual Hour Burden

The current flow of applicants is approximately 124 per month. Assuming a constant rate, the ECR program should receive approximately **1,488 applications per year**. Using an estimated response time of **25 minutes per application**, the **annual burden for applicants is 620 hours**. The increase in burden hours is due to the increase in the number of ECR applications received since the last approval period—the ECR now receives approximately 12% more applications per month.

A.12 - 1 ESTIMATES OF ANNUALIZED BURDEN HOURS

Type of Respondents	Number of Respondents	Number of Responses per Respondent	Average Burden Per Response (in hours)	Total Annual Burden Hours
Private Sector Research scientists	1,488	1	25/60	620
Totals		1,488		620

A.12.2 Annualized Cost to Respondents

The Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) was used to calculate the annualized cost to respondents. The OEWS survey is part of a federal-state cooperative program between the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and State Workforce Agencies (SWAs). The program produces employment and wage estimates annually for approximately 830 occupations based on a survey of business establishments (employers) —using data from the fifty states and the District of Columbia. The OEWS program uses the Office of Management and Budget's Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system to classify jobs into occupations based on their job duties. The OEWS estimates are constructed from a sample of about 1.1 million establishments collected over a 3-year period.

Based on an estimate of 1,488 applications per year, each taking 25 minutes to complete, the anticipated average annual respondent cost of the ECR online application is $26,734.40.

Type of Respondents	Total Annual Burden Hours	Hourly Respondent Wage Rate*	Respondent Cost
Research Scientists	620	$43.12	$26,734.40
Totals	620		$26,734.40

* Source of estimate: https://data.bls.gov/oes/#/industry/000000 (Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations; 19-0000 occupation code)

A.13 Estimate of Other Total Annual Cost Burden to Respondents or Record Keepers

There are no additional cost burdens to respondents other than those described in section A.12.2.

A.14 Annualized Cost to the Federal Government

As described in Section A.3 on Burden Reduction, NIH/CSR staff members are involved in maintaining the software application and in the processing of applications for the ECR program. EAVS greatly reduces the staffing resources needed to process applications, provide feedback to applicants, and manage application data. ECR personnel costs related to the processing of applications includes 3% Program Director time and 15% Software Developer time. The estimated annual cost to the federal government for is $29,604.00.

Cost Descriptions	Grade/ Step	Salary	% of Effort	Fringe (if applicable)	Total Cost to Gov't
Federal Oversight					
Program Director	15/10	197,200	3%		5,916.00
Contractor Cost					
Senior Software Developer		141,000	15%	12%	23,688.00
Travel					
Other Cost					
Total					29,604.00

*the Salary in table above is cited from https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/salary-tables/pdf/2026/DCB.pdf

A.15 Explanation for Program Changes or Adjustments

Changes to EAVS include the addition of two questions that ask about applicants' publication record. Data captured from these questions will be used to help determine program eligibility more easily and will reduce the number of false rejections from the program. An adjustment has also been made to the burden hours. This adjustment increases the burden hours from 555 hours to 620 hours due to the slight increase in the

number of ECR applications (1,332 to 1,488) received since the last approval period—the ECR now receives approximately 12% more applications per month (i.e., 124 vs. 111).

A.16 Plans for Tabulation and Publication and Project Time Schedule

We do not intend to publish information derived from applications submitted through EAVS. The ECR program is ongoing and there are no plans to terminate the program in the near future. The EAVS system will be immediately revised after OMB approval (if granted) and data collection will end with the expiration date of the OMB control number listed on the application unless the application is renewed.

A.17 Reason(s) Display of OMB Expiration Date is Inappropriate

We are not requesting approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval. Therefore, Section A.17 is not applicable.

A.18 Exceptions to Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act Submissions

We are not requesting an exception to certification for the Paperwork Reduction Act. Therefore, Section A.18 is not applicable.