

Review Criteria for Competitive Grant Applications*

Core Review Criteria. Comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the five core review criteria listed below and provide a score from 1 (exceptional) to 9 (poor) for each criterion. Please see the attached chart for a more detailed explanation of the scoring metric.

- 1) **Significance.** Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field? Most importantly, if the aims of the project are achieved, will this preliminary study lead to a larger project that will be competitive for externally-sponsored funding?
- 2) **Investigator(s).** Are the PD/PIs, collaborators, and other researchers well suited to the project? If Early Stage Investigators or New Investigators, do they have appropriate experience and training? If established, have they demonstrated an ongoing record of accomplishments that have advanced their field(s)? If the project is collaborative or multi-PD/PI, do the investigators have complementary and integrated expertise that is appropriate for the project?
- 3) **Innovation.** Does the application a) challenge and seek to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms by utilizing novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions, or b) propose a refinement, improvement, or new application of theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions?
- 4) **Approach.** Are the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project? Are potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success presented? If the project is in the early stages of development, will the strategy establish feasibility and will risky aspects be managed appropriately?
- 5) **Environment.** Will the scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success? Are the institutional and departmental support, equipment and other physical resources available to the investigators adequate for the project proposed? Will the project benefit from unique features of the scientific environment, subject populations, or collaborative arrangements?

Additional Review Criteria. If applicable for the application, comment on the following and consider them in providing an **Overall Impact Score** (see below):

- **Previous Critiques.** When reviewing an application previously reviewed by the Scientific Review Committee, evaluate the application as now presented, taking into consideration the responses to comments from the previous scientific review group and changes made to the project.
- **Potential for External Support.** Will the preliminary data obtained from this study make a larger proposal competitive for extramural funding?
- **Protections for Human Subjects.** If the project involves clinical research, are the plans for 1) protection of human subjects from research risks, and 2) inclusion of minorities and members of both sexes/genders, as well as the inclusion of children, justified in terms of the scientific goals and research strategy proposed? Has IRB approval been obtained or is an application currently pending?
- **Vertebrate Animals.** If the project involves live vertebrate animals, are the proposed uses and procedures adequately justified? Has IACUC approval been obtained or is an application currently pending?
- **Biohazards.** Assess whether materials or procedures proposed are potentially hazardous to research personnel and/or the environment, and if needed, determine whether adequate protection is proposed.

Additional Considerations. Comment on the following but do not consider them in providing an overall impact score.

- **Responsiveness to the RFA.** Is this application responsive to the RFA for this program?
- **Budget and Period of Support.** Are the budget and the requested period of support appropriately justified?
- **Grantsmanship.** Are there any suggestions for improvement?

Overall Impact Score. Provide an overall impact score to reflect your assessment of the scientific and technical merit of the application, considering the five core review criteria and any additional review criteria that are applicable to the project. An application does not need to be strong in all categories to have a high overall impact. For example, a project that by its nature is not innovative may be essential to obtain the preliminary data needed for a subsequent proposal to an external sponsor to become competitive.

*Based on NIH reviewer guidelines.

9-Point Score Chart

Impact	Score	Descriptor	Strengths/Weaknesses
High Impact	1	Exceptional	
	2	Outstanding	
	3	Excellent	
Moderate Impact	4	Very Good	
	5	Good	
	6	Satisfactory	
Low Impact	7	Fair	
	8	Marginal	
	9	Poor	

Non-numeric score options: NR = Not Recommended for Further Consideration, DF = Deferred, AB = Abstention, CF = Conflict, NP = Not Present, ND=Not Discussed

Additional Guidance on Strengths and Weaknesses

The graphical representation of strengths and weaknesses (the far right column) is provided to illustrate the relative balance of strengths and weaknesses associated with each rating score. Reviewers should consider not only the relative number of strengths and weaknesses noted, but also the importance of these strengths and weaknesses to the criteria or to the overall impact when determining a score. For example, a major strength may outweigh many minor and correctable weaknesses. The table below provides additional guidance to assist reviewers in determining their ratings.

Score	Descriptor	Additional Guidance on Strengths/Weaknesses
1	Exceptional	Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
2	Outstanding	Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
3	Excellent	Very strong with only some minor weaknesses
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
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

Minor Weakness: An easily addressable weakness that does not substantially lessen impact

Moderate Weakness: A weakness that lessens impact

Major Weakness: A weakness that severely limits impact