

# Recent Changes and Updates for NIH/NIA Grant Applications

*Clin-STAR Webinar*  
*April 13, 2026*

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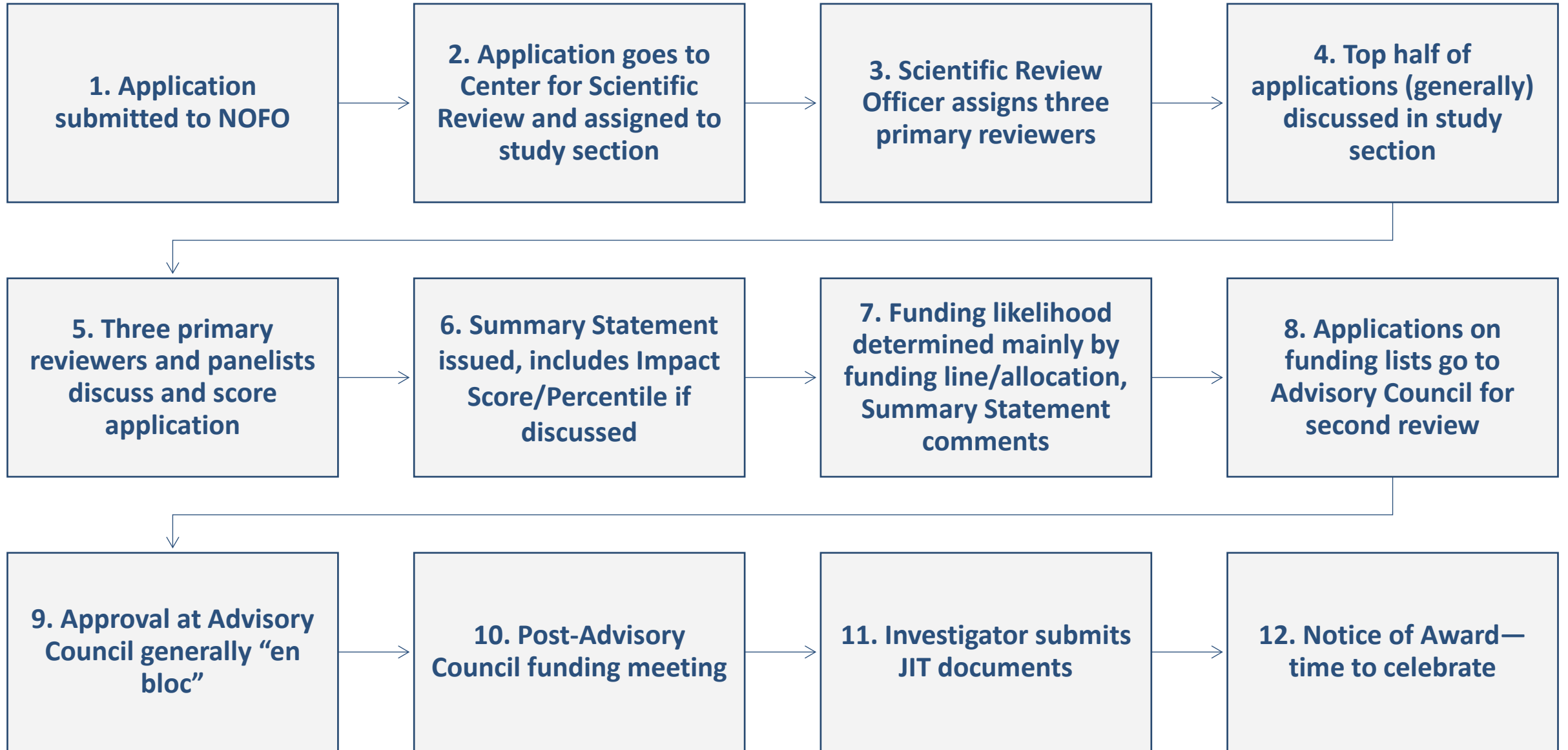


National Institute  
on Aging

April 30, 2026

# Preparing Your NIH/NIA Grant Application

# Journey from Application to Award

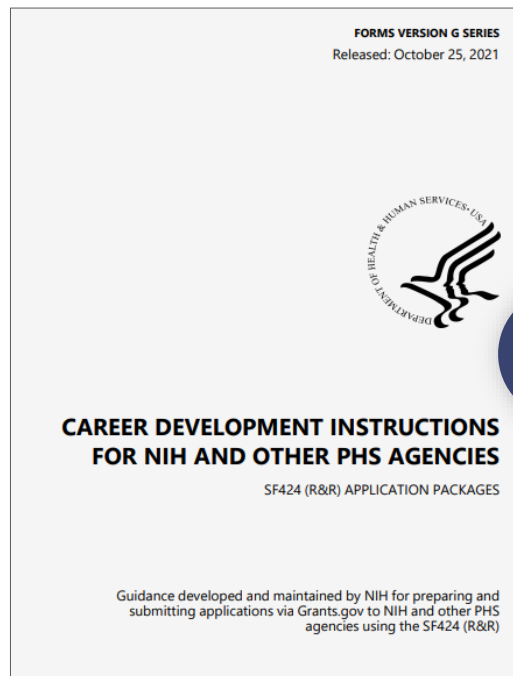


# Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs)

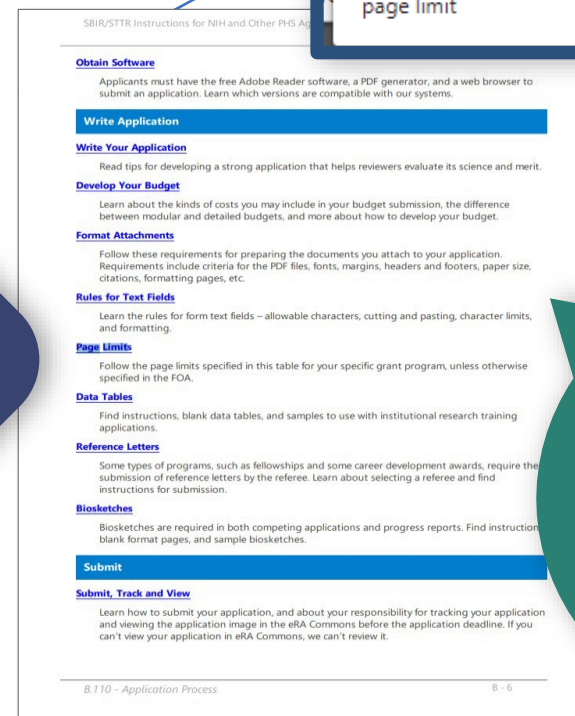
- Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFO) are the primary **way that NIH institutes invite new research**.
- NOFOs explain the **research priority area** and **provide guidance** on application requirements.
- The **details matter** – what you can ask for (budget, time, activity), what reviewers will consider when assessing the science, and how the NIH will make awards.
- Most science is funded out of “parent announcements” on investigator-identified topics (e.g., [PA-25-301](#))

# First Steps – Application Materials

- Read the NOFO
- Review the SF 424 Application Guide



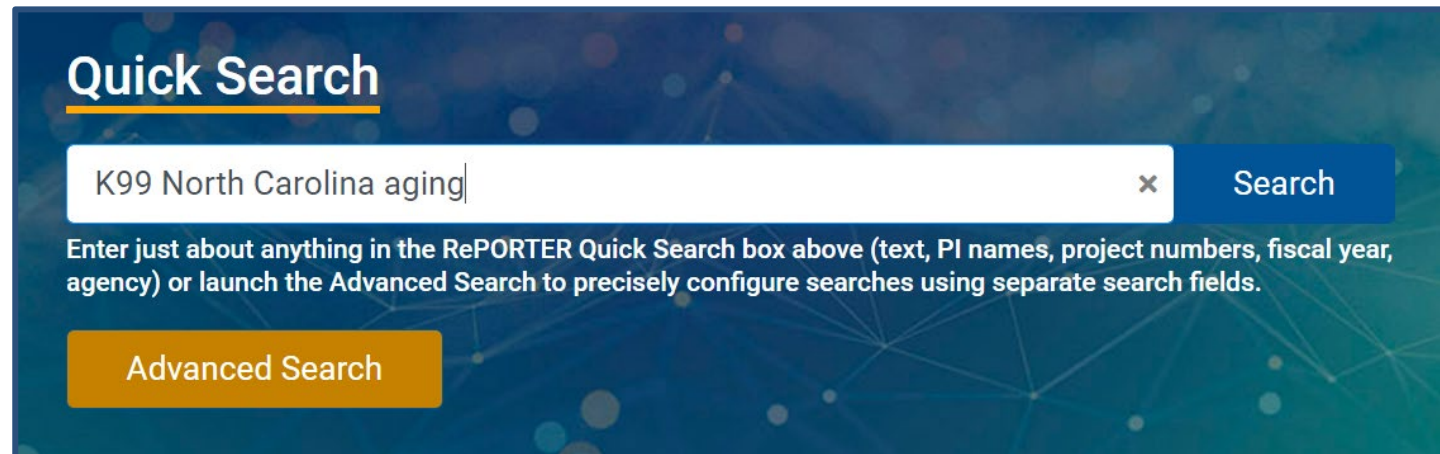
Use “Ctrl F”  
keyword search  
on this document.  
That’s what I do!



Use NIH  
ASSIST for  
application  
submission,  
and review the  
**annotated  
application  
forms**

# First Steps – Application Materials

- Read the NOFO
- Review the SF 424 Application Guide
- Review Sample Applications
  - [Sample K99 applications from NIA](#)
  - [Sample R and K Applications from NIAID](#)
  - Use NIH Reporter ([reporter.nih.gov](https://reporter.nih.gov))



**Quick Search**

K99 North Carolina aging

Enter just about anything in the RePORTER Quick Search box above (text, PI names, project numbers, fiscal year, agency) or launch the Advanced Search to precisely configure searches using separate search fields.

Start early!

Application Component	Length Limit
Abstract	30 lines of text
Project Narrative	3 sentences
Applicant Biosketch	5 pages
Mentor Biosketch	5 pages
Budget Justification	no limit
Candidate Information and Goals for Career Development and Research Strategy	12 pages for combined sections
Specific Aims	1 page
Plans and Statements of Mentor and Co-mentor(s)	6 pages
Letters of Support from Collaborators, Contributors, and Consultants	6 pages
Institutional Environment	1 page
Institutional Commitment to Candidate Career Development	1 page
3 Reference Letters	2 pages each

# When to talk to a Program Officer



When you are preparing to submit/have a great idea but want broad feedback, advice on NOFO or activity code (e.g. R01 v. K01?), Study Section



After summary statement is issued



Post-award for updates, prior approval requests, discussion about supplements, renewals

# Specific Aims Page: Basis of Conversations with POs and Applications

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- Outlines application significance, hypotheses, data, methods at high-level—don't bury the lede!
- Gestalt of what you propose to do
- No magic number of aims—should be appropriate for activity code, budget, project period
- “Do less better”: far preferable to have 2 good aims than 2 good aims and a third so-so aim

# Tips for a Strong Application

# Specific Aims Page

Usually the **FIRST** thing reviewers read!  
Sometimes the **ONLY** thing reviewers read!

<i>Succinctly Cover Main Points:</i>	<i>Think Like a Primary Reviewer:</i>
<b>WHAT</b> research question are you addressing?	“This applicant is interested in....”
<b>WHY</b> is this research question important?	“Which is an important question because ...”
<b>HOW</b> will you address this research question?	“To address this question, the applicant plans to ...”

**Have a friend in another lab read your aims and fill in these blanks for you!**

# Tips – K Applications

- **Potential for career development** – will this project allow you to build new skills and fill gaps in your professional development?
- **Pitfalls and alternative solutions** – be honest about the weaknesses of your work—acknowledging them shows your sophistication (and reviewers will find them anyways); propose strategies to address
- **Timeline** – integrate career development activities with research activities
- **Clarify K99 vs R00 plans** – make sure reviewers understand which parts you plan to do in your postdoc lab vs in your independent lab

# Tips – Mentoring Team (K Applications)

- **Integrate** mentoring team with research plan – have mentors that cover all needed areas of expertise
  - Don't add unnecessary mentors!
- Be **specific** – how often will you meet? In person? 1:1 or group settings?
- **Align expectations** with your mentors
  - Your career development plan and their mentor statement should match

# More Application Tips

- Grantspersonship matters—be clear and coherent, use visual cues to guide the reviewer through your application. Don't neglect conceptual model!
- Secondary data analyses are funded, including for R01s
- R01s have higher standard in terms of expectations of preliminary data, but provide it if you have it
- Provide power analyses (if applicable) across activity codes
- If you say someone else will do something, get a letter of support confirming this

# Recent Application Updates from NIH/NIA

# Implementing a Unified NIH Funding Strategy to Guide Consistent and Clearer Award Decisions

November 21, 2025

Today, NIH has implemented steps towards a unified strategy that will help guide clearer and consistent funding decisions across all Institutes, Centers, and Offices (ICOs). Building on the [August NIH Director's statement](#), this [framework](#) (effective January 2026 Council round) will help ensure we continue to support the most scientifically meritorious research ideas possible, address health priorities, and support a robust biomedical workforce.

Our funding decisions must balance many competing and dynamic factors when determining the most meritorious research ideas to support. These factors center around peer review, health priorities, scientific opportunities, the workforce, availability of funds, and the wider research portfolio. Thoroughly addressing this balance has implications for the pace of scientific advancements and responsiveness to the often-changing nature of biomedical scientific progress.

With our prior approaches as a foundation, implementing this new framework is based on a set of core tenets for ICO funding policies to ensure NIH mission and health priorities are being achieved.

## Core Tenets

All ICO funding policies should:

- Align with the NIH's mission
- Prioritize scientific merit; ICOs should consider peer review information in its entirety
- Integrate a breadth of topics and approaches relevant to the ICO's priorities
- Consider investigator career stage and promote sustainability of the biomedical research workforce
- Promote broad distribution and geographic balance of funding, considering the total amount and type of NIH funding already available to each investigator
- Align with the availability of ICO funds

# NIH ICO Profiles: Mission Areas, Funding Priorities, and Opportunities

The following NIH institutes, centers, and offices (ICOs) fund grant awards. Check each ICO's mission, any areas of special interest, funding strategy, and current funding opportunities.

Once you've identified one or more ICO, reach out to the relevant program officials to discuss your proposal, its fit within the ICO's mission and priorities, and to get advice on appropriate funding opportunities. [Understand NIH Staff Roles](#) and find contact information through the links below.

## Quick Links

[FIC](#)[NCATS](#)[NCCIH](#)[NCI](#)[NEI](#)[NHGRI](#)[NHLBI](#)[NIA](#)[NIAAA](#)[NIAID](#)[NIAMS](#)[NIBIB](#)[NICHD](#)[NIDA](#)[NIDCD](#)[NIDCR](#)[NIDDK](#)[NIEHS](#)[NIGMS](#)[NIMH](#)[NIMHD](#)[NINDS](#)[NINR](#)[NLM](#)[NIH OD  
Offices](#)

1. Click on the ICO “tile” to be taken to the mission statement.
2. From there, click on the ICO name to be taken to the specific page with that ICO’s scientific interest areas, Highlighted Topics, etc.

[Home](#) > [Funding](#) > [Find a Fit for Your Research](#) > Highlighted Topics

## Funding

### NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts

### Funding Categories ▶

### Find a Fit for Your Research ▼

Highlighted Topics

NIH Institutes, Centers, and Offices

### Explore Who and What NIH Funds

# Highlighted Topics

Check the list regularly as new topics are added in the coming months and beyond. Read more about highlighted topics in the [August 2025 NIH Extramural Nexus article](#).



Title	Lead ICO	Participating ICOs	Posted Date	Expiration Date
<a href="#">Research on the Transition from Pediatric to Adult Health Care</a>	All	NIA	September 11, 2025	August 29, 2026
<a href="#">Advancing Prevention and Treatment of Bacterial Sexually Transmitted Infections in HIV-Affected Populations</a>	NICHD	NICHD, NHLBI, NIAAA, NIDA, NIDCR, NIDDK, NIMH, NINR, OBSSR, ODP, ORWH	September 11, 2025	September 11, 2026
<a href="#">Understanding the Impact of Immune Function on Neurocognition and Substance Use Disorder Risk Across the Lifespan (IMMUNE-LIFESPAN)</a>	NIDA	NIDA, NIAAA, ORWH	September 10, 2025	September 10, 2026

# How to Find NOFOs

- Grants.gov is the single official source for NIH NOFOs ([NOT-OD-25-143](#))
- Use the [Explore NIH Grant Opportunities webpage](#) to search active NIH NOFOs by ICO; category (research, training, etc.); and keyword
  - Links out to Grants.gov
- Use Grants.gov to search for forecasted NOFOs
  - Use NIA's assistance listing number (93.866)

# Early Expiration of NIA AD/ADRD PARs

- [PAR-25-332](#) for R01s and [PAR-25-331](#) for R21s were sunsetted early with the NIH-wide elimination of NOSIs
- NIA remains committed to the areas of research outlined in the PARs and NOSIs
- Applicants can submit an unsolicited grant application to any of the [NIH Parent NOFOs](#)
- Resubmissions to a parent announcement following an initial submission to an AD/ADRD PAR **are** allowed (see: [NIH resubmission policies](#))

# Common Forms for Biosketch and Other Support

- New requirement to use [SciENcv](#) to produce digitally certified PDF(s) of Biosketch and Other Support Forms for all application, RPPR, JIT, and prior approval request submissions after **May 2026**.
- Biosketch:
  - Common Form and Supplement are required for all individuals typically/previously required to submit a biosketch (e.g., all senior/key personnel). **This includes mentors and sponsors for K and F awards!**
  - Two separate forms but completed and certified together to produce a single PDF.
- Current and Pending (Other) Support:
  - Common Form required for all individuals typically/previously required to submit Other Support (e.g., all senior/key personnel). Generally not required for training grant (T) faculty or other significant contributors.
- NIH requires certification from each individual (not their delegate) of their own form(s) in [SciENcv](#).

# Keep in touch with the NIA Training Team!



Shoshana Kahana,  
Training Lead



Maria Carranza,  
Training Officer



Jamie Lahvic,  
Training Officer



Laura Major,  
Training Officer



Allie Walker,  
Training Analyst

[NIATraining@mail.nih.gov](mailto:NIATraining@mail.nih.gov)

## How we can help:

**Connect PIs with POs to receive  
scientific feedback on specific aims**

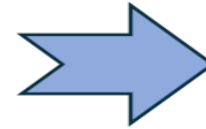
**Answer policy or eligibility  
questions**

# Recent Review Updates from NIH/NIA

# Reasons Behind the Changes to the SRF

## 1. Organization of peer review criteria had become too complex

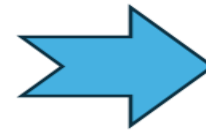
- ❖ Persistent feedback from reviewers and observed by NIH Staff
- ❖ Expansion of administrative and policy-compliance expectations for reviewers



**Detracts attention from the critical, primary role of reviewers to evaluate scientific merit**

## 2. Undue influence of reputation in NIH peer review

- ❖ Concerns from the community
- ❖ Observations by NIH Staff or NIH leadership



**Affects judgements of merit when well known places/people are given a pass and others treated with more scrutiny**

# Goals for the Simplified Review Framework (SRF)

- **Refocus first-level peer review on its singular role of providing advice to NIH regarding the scientific/technical merit of grant applications** by reorganizing review criteria and by relieving reviewers of responsibility for administrative/policy compliance items
- **Reduce the potential for reputational bias in the peer review process**—that is, the potential for the reputation of the investigator or institution to have an undue influence on the assessment of an application—by changing the way investigators and institutions are evaluated during review
- **The changes apply to the following RPG activity codes:** R01, R03, R15, R16, R21, R33, R34, R36, R61, RC1, RC2, RC4, RF1, RL1, RL2, U01, U34, U3R, UA5, UC1, UC2, UC4, UF1, UG3, UH2, UH3, UH5, (including the following phased awards: R21/R33, UH2/UH3, UG3/UH3, R61/R33)

# Simplified Review Framework

## Review Criteria

### OVERALL IMPACT

The likelihood for the project exert a sustained, powerful Influence on the research field(s) Involved, considering the 3 Factors and Additional Review Criteria (as applicable)

### Additional Review Considerations

*(no effect on Overall Impact score)*

- Authentication of Key Biological/Chemical Resources
- Budget and Period of Support

### 3 Factors (Simplified Review Framework)

- **Factor 1:** Importance of the Research (Significance & Innovation)
- **Factor 2:** Rigor and Feasibility (Approach)
- **Factor 3:** Expertise and Resources (Investigator & Environment)

### Additional Review Criteria

- Protections for Human Subjects
- Vertebrate Animals
- Biohazards
- Resubmissions, Renewals, Revisions

# Simplified Review Framework (SRF)

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- Reviewers Address 3 Key Questions about the Proposed Project

## *1. Should it be done?*

- **Factor 1:** Importance of the Research (Significance and Innovation)

## *2. Can it be done well?*

- **Factor 2:** Rigor and Feasibility (Approach)

## *3. Are the expertise and resources in place to do it?*

- **Factor 3:** Expertise and Resources (Investigator and Environment)

# SRF Continued....

## Factor 1 - Should it be done? Importance of the Research

### Significance:

- Evaluate how the proposed project, if successfully completed, would advance the field. What will be learned and how valuable will that knowledge be?
- Assess whether the application addresses an important gap in knowledge in the field, would solve a critical problem, or create a valuable conceptual or technical advance.

### Innovation:

- Evaluate the rationale of the study and the extent to which that novelty influences the importance of the research. It is important to focus on the rigor of the scientific background for the work (e.g., prior literature and/or preliminary data) and whether the scientific background justifies the proposed study.

# SRF Continued....

## Factor 2 - Can it be done well? Rigor and Feasibility

- **Rigor**: Evaluate the potential to produce unbiased, reproducible, robust data.
- **Feasibility**: Evaluate whether the proposed approach as presented is sound and achievable, including plans to address potential challenges.
- As an integral part **assessment of rigor and feasibility**, evaluate **inclusion plans** and plans to recruit and retain participants. Inclusions: Sex, Race and ethnicity, Age across the lifespan Phase III clinical trials -- Plans for valid design and analysis of sex, race, and ethnicity. Inclusions must be scientifically justified.
- ❖ Scoring Factors 1 & 2: • Scores in the high range (1-3) should be based on strengths, not merely the absence of weaknesses. • Scores in the low range (7-9) should be based on weaknesses

# SRF Continued...

## Factor 3 - Expertise and Resources in place?

- Evaluate whether the investigator(s), as presented, have demonstrated background, training, and expertise, as appropriate for their career stage, to conduct *the proposed research project*.
- Evaluate whether the institutional resources, as presented, are appropriate to ensure the successful execution of *the proposed research project*.
- Do not evaluate the team/institution outside the context of *the proposed research* (e.g., based on academic title, funding status, general reputation) as this introduces bias.
- Do not evaluate personnel effort in Factor 3 (belongs in the Budget).

# SRF Continued....

- **Additional Review Criteria:**

- ■ As applicable for the project proposed, reviewers will consider the following additional items while determining scientific and technical merit, but will not give criterion scores for these items, and **should consider** them in providing an overall impact score.
- ■
- ➤ Protections for Human Subjects, Vertebrate Animals, and Biohazards: Comments are required if there are concerns.
- ■
- ➤ Resubmissions, Renewals, and Revisions: Describe major strengths/weaknesses, if any.

# SRF Continued...

**Additional Review Considerations:** As applicable for the project proposed, reviewers will consider each of the following items, but will not give scores for these items, and **should not consider** them in providing an overall impact score.

- **Authentication of Key Biological and/or Chemical Resources:**

- For projects involving key biological and/or chemical resources, evaluate the brief plans proposed for identifying and ensuring the validity of those resources.

- **Budget and Period of Support:**

- Evaluate whether the budget and the requested period of support are fully justified and reasonable in relation to the proposed research.

# Emergency Modifications to NIH Peer review

In order to address the backlog of applications emergency modifications to NIH review processes and policies will be made for Jan and May 2026 Council

## Reduce the percentage of applications discussed in most meetings.

- Committees will vote for which applications to discuss in three groups:
  - The top third (30 to 35 percent) will be discussed in the review meeting and considered for funding.
  - The middle third will be designated as “competitive but not discussed” and considered for funding.
  - The lowest third will be designated as “not competitive and not discussed.”
- This change will allow nearly all review meetings to run within one day and make recruiting reviewers and rescheduling meetings easier.

# Emergency Modifications to NIH Peer review

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- Simplified summary statements will continue to provide the necessary information regarding applications' scientific merit to advisory Councils and IC program staff. Summary statements will have:
  - A sentence describing the degree of consensus in the committee vote.
  - Bullets describing the main score driving points.
  - Written critiques from the three assigned reviewers.
  - For discussed applications, the overall impact score.

# NIH Review Criteria

Review Criteria			
Career Development (K)	Fellowships (F)	Multi-Project (P01; U19)	Single Project (R01; R03;R21) NEW-SRF
Candidate	Fellowship Applicant	Significance	Factor 1
Career Development Plan/Career Goals & Objectives/Plan to Provide Mentoring	Sponsors, Collaborators, and Consultants	Investigator(s)	Factor 2
Research Plan	Research Training Plan	Innovation	Factor 3
Mentor(s), Co-Mentor(s), Consultant(s), Collaborator(s)	Training Potential	Approach	
Environment and Institutional Commitment to the Candidate	Institutional Environment & Commitment to Training	Environment	

# If you weren't funded on the first try...

## Rejection is painful, but feedback provides a roadmap for next steps

- Carefully review the Summary Statement (written critiques)
- Discuss the Summary Statement with your NIH program official
- Use reviewer comments to improve your application

## Revise and resubmit the application

- Introduction Page: Respond to reviewer critiques
- Be constructive, NOT defensive

## Learn more about funded grants

- Talk to successful applicants
- Understand the review process and dynamics: <https://public.csr.nih.gov>

# Other changes happening at NIH

- **For PIs:** [NOT-OD-26-064: Update of NIH Late Application Submission Policy and End of Continuous Submission](#)
- New Biographical Sketch: Professional preparation: NIH requires a new, standardized Biosketch format (Common Form) via [SciENCv](#)
- To best review the training and career development grants that were formerly ICreviewed, CSR established **42 new recurring Special Emphasis Panels (SEPs)** to handle K and T mechanisms.
- NIH Invites Input on a Revised Clinical Trial Application Form to Reduce Burden and Enhance Review: By April 17, 2026 on a Proposed Clinical Trial-Specific Application Form ([NOT-OD-26-058](#))
- Request for Information on Reducing Reliance on Human Embryonic Stem Cells in NIH-Supported Research: Top of Form Comments will be accepted until **April 24, 2026**
- [What Are the Components of a Collaborative International Research Project \(PF5\) Application and What Should Be Included?](#)

Component	Required?	Page Limit	What to include	Budget Scope	Review Considerations
International Project	At least 1 required (one per participating international organization)	6-page Research Strategy (each)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scope of work conducted at the international organization</li> <li>• Unique resources, expertise, populations, or capabilities that justify the collaboration</li> <li>• Description of how the international work integrates with the overall project</li> </ul>	Budget specific to the international organization	Not individually scored; reviewers designate 'Recommended' or 'Not Recommended'

# NIA

## The Leader in Aging Research

