

## **GUIDELINES FOR REVIEWERS' WRITTEN COMMENTS SMALL GRANT PROGRAM FOR NIDDK K01/K08/K23 RECIPIENTS (R03)**

The NIH R03 small grant is a mechanism for supporting discrete, well-defined projects that realistically can be completed in two years and that require limited levels of funding. Because the research plan is restricted to 10 pages, an R03 grant application will not have the same level of detail or extensive discussion found in an R01 application. Accordingly, reviewers should evaluate the conceptual framework and general approach to the problem, placing less emphasis on methodological details and certain indicators traditionally used in evaluating the scientific merit of R01 applications including supportive preliminary data. Appropriate justification for the proposed work can be provided through literature citations, data from other sources, or from investigator-generated data. Preliminary data are not required, particularly in applications proposing pilot or feasibility studies.

This R03 award is intended to provide additional research support as the K01, K08, or K23 recipient transitions to independent investigator status. The scientific directions of the proposed project may not have been anticipated by the project originally outlined in the K01, K08, or K23 application, but instead may reflect the emerging research focus of the investigator as a consequence of that research. Include additional headings when they seem appropriate to the review. Refer to the NIH program announcement on the enclosed CD for more detail about the award. The format outlined below should be followed in preparing your comments for each R03 application assigned to you for evaluation.

### **INSTRUCTIONS FOR WRITTEN CRITIQUE AND PRELIMINARY SCORES**

Please use the following guidelines when preparing written comments on R03 research project grant applications assigned to you for review.

#### **Written Critiques**

- The format of the critiques should follow the structured template provided for each mechanism, which can be downloaded from the Internet Assisted Review (IAR) site and found on the CD.
- Each core criterion and additional review criteria are represented in the reviewer template and should be commented on, listing the strengths and weaknesses of each in a bulleted form.
- The goal is to provide the maximum and most pertinent information in a concise manner.
- After considering all of the review criteria, briefly summarize the strengths and weaknesses of the application in the Overall Impact section of the template.
- Assigned reviewers must upload critiques before entering an overall impact/priority score.
- Criterion scores should be entered in IAR before the review meeting.
- Assigned reviewers may submit criterion scores only after their critiques have been uploaded. At the SRO's discretion, discussants who are assigned to the application and SRG members who are not assigned to the application may submit criterion scores without critiques.
- The criterion scores may be changed during FINAL SCORING on your electronic or paper Voter/Scoring Sheet, or following the review meeting during the EDIT phase.
- Please do not write your criterion scores on the critique template.

#### **Preliminary Scores**

- Each core review criterion should be given a score using the nine-point rating scale in accordance with the new Enhanced Peer Review Criteria.
- The criterion scores for the applications should be entered in the meeting Internet Assisted Review (IAR) site in NIH Commons before the review meeting using the same page that is used for submitting the preliminary impact/priority score and critique.

- The criterion scores may be changed following the review meeting during the EDIT phase.
- In the READ phase of the meeting reviewers may submit their scores and critiques, but may not edit them. Core criterion scores can be submitted only after your critique had been uploaded into IAR.
- The criterion scores will appear in the summary statement as part of your critique.

## **Core Review Criteria**

Reviewers are asked to consider each of the five review criteria below in the determination of scientific and technical merit, and give a separate score for each. These individual criterion scores are considered part of your critique and will not be discussed at the review meeting. They may be changed in the EDIT phase in Commons. An application does not need to be strong in all categories to be judged likely to have major scientific impact. For example, a project that by its nature is not innovative may be essential to advance a field.

### ***Significance***

Does this study address an important problem? If the aims of the application are achieved, how will scientific knowledge or clinical practice be advanced? What will be the effect of these studies on the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field? Is there an adequate explanation and justification included that documents how the proposed R03 support will affect plans and enhance the progress of the K01/K08/K23 awardee? **How likely is it that the proposed work will lead to an independent line of investigation for the applicant, distinct from that of his/her mentor?**

### ***Investigator(s)***

Are the investigators appropriately trained and well suited to carry out this work? Is the work proposed appropriate to the experience level of the principal investigator and other researchers? Does the investigative team bring complementary and integrated expertise to the project (if applicable)? What has the applicant accomplished to date toward the goals of the awarded K01/K08/K23? What is the potential of this mechanism to successfully prepare the applicant to be competitive for funding opportunities at the end of the award? Does the mentor's letter adequately discuss the applicant's progress and potential to become an independent investigator? What is the continuing relationship between the applicant and the mentor?

### ***Innovation***

Is the project original and innovative? For example: Does the project challenge existing paradigms or clinical practice; address an innovative hypothesis or critical barrier to progress in the field? Does the project develop or employ novel concepts, approaches, methodologies, tools, or technologies for this area? **Have the research goals of the current application diverged from the original K01/K08/K23 aims? If the original "K" award goals have been modified, is an explanation of the changes and reasons satisfactory?**

### ***Approach***

Are the conceptual or clinical framework, design, methods, and analyses adequately developed, well integrated, well reasoned, and appropriate to the aims of the project? Does the applicant acknowledge potential problem areas and consider alternative tactics? **How feasible is the research plan for two years of work?**

### ***Environment***

Does the scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success? Do the proposed studies benefit from unique features of the scientific environment, or subject populations, or employ useful collaborative arrangements? Is there evidence of institutional support? Is there evidence of continued commitment by the sponsoring institution to the applicant via available and adequate facilities, educational resources and opportunities, as well as continued mentorship?

## **Additional Review Criteria**

As applicable for the project proposed, reviewers are asked to consider the following additional items in the determination of scientific and technical merit, but not to give separate scores for these items.

### ***Protections for Human Subjects***

For research that involves human subjects but does not involve one of the six categories of research that are exempt under 45 CFR Part 46 (as described in [Human Subjects Protection and Inclusion](#)), reviewers are asked to evaluate the justification for involvement of human subjects and the proposed protections from research risk relating to their participation according to the following five review criteria: 1) risk to subjects, 2) adequacy of protection against risks, 3) potential benefits to the subjects and others, 4) importance of the knowledge to be gained, and 5) data and safety monitoring for clinical trials. If all of the criteria are adequately addressed, and there are no concerns, write "Acceptable Risks and/or Adequate Protections." A brief explanation is advisable. If one or more criteria are inadequately addressed, write, "Unacceptable Risks and/or Inadequate Protections" and document the actual or potential issues that create the human subjects concern. Also, if a clinical trial is proposed, evaluate the Data and Safety Monitoring Plan. (If the plan is absent, notify the SRO immediately to determine if the application should be withdrawn.) Indicate if the plan is "Acceptable" or "Unacceptable", and, if unacceptable, explain why it is unacceptable.

For research that involves human subjects and meets the criteria for one or more of the six categories of research that are exempt, evaluate: 1) the justification for the exemption, 2) human subjects involvement and characteristics, and 3) sources of materials. If the claimed exemption is not justified, indicate "Unacceptable", and, if unacceptable, explain why it is unacceptable.

*NOTE: To the degree that acceptability or unacceptability affects the investigator's approach to the proposed research, such comments should appear under "Approach" in the five major review criteria above, and should be factored into the score as appropriate.*

For additional information to assist you in making these determinations, please refer to [http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/guidelines\\_general/Human\\_Subjects\\_Protection\\_and\\_Inclusion.pdf](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/guidelines_general/Human_Subjects_Protection_and_Inclusion.pdf) and [http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/guidelines\\_general/Human\\_Subjects\\_Worksheet.pdf](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/guidelines_general/Human_Subjects_Worksheet.pdf).

### ***Inclusion of Women, Minorities and Children***

When the proposed project involves clinical research, reviewers are asked to evaluate the proposed plans for inclusion of minorities and members of both genders, as well as the inclusion of children.

Public Law 103-43 requires that women and minorities must be included in all NIH-supported clinical research projects involving human subjects unless a clear and compelling rationale establishes that inclusion is inappropriate with respect to the health of the subjects or the purpose of the research. NIH requires that children (individuals under the age of 21) of all ages be involved in all human subjects research supported by the NIH unless there are scientific or ethical reasons for excluding them. Each project involving human subjects must be assigned a code using the categories "1" to "5" below. Category 5 for minority representation in the project means that only foreign subjects are in the study population (no U.S. subjects). If the study uses both then use codes 1 thru 4. Examine whether the minority and gender characteristics of the sample are scientifically acceptable, consistent with the aims of the project, and comply with NIH policy. For each category, determine if the proposed subject recruitment targets are "A" (acceptable) or "U" (unacceptable). If you rate the sample as "U", consider this feature a weakness in the research design and reflect it in the overall score. Explain the reasons for the recommended codes; this is particularly critical for any item coded "U".

*NOTE: To the degree that acceptability or unacceptability affects the investigator's approach to the proposed research, such comments should appear under "Approach" in the five major review criteria above, and should be factored into the score as appropriate.*

<b><u>Gender Inclusion Code</u></b>	<b><u>Minority Inclusion Code</u></b>	<b><u>Children Inclusion Code</u></b>
<b>G1</b> = Both genders	<b>M1</b> = Minority and nonminority	<b>C1</b> = Children and adults
<b>G2</b> = Only women	<b>M2</b> = Only minority	<b>C2</b> = Only children
<b>G3</b> = Only men	<b>M3</b> = Only nonminority	<b>C3</b> = No children included
<b>G4</b> = Gender composition unknown	<b>M4</b> = Minority composition unknown	<b>C4</b> = Representation of children unknown
	<b>M5</b> = Only foreign subjects	

For additional information to assist you in making these determinations, please refer to [http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/guidelines\\_general/Human\\_Subjects\\_Protection\\_and\\_Inclusion.pdf](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/guidelines_general/Human_Subjects_Protection_and_Inclusion.pdf) and [http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/guidelines\\_general/Human\\_Subjects\\_Worksheet.pdf](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/guidelines_general/Human_Subjects_Worksheet.pdf).

### ***Vertebrate Animals***

Reviewers are asked to evaluate the involvement of live vertebrate animals as part of the scientific assessment according to the following five points: 1) proposed use of the animals, and species, strains, ages, sex, and numbers to be used; 2) justifications for the use of animals and for the appropriateness of the species and numbers proposed; 3) adequacy of veterinary care; 4) procedures for limiting discomfort, distress, pain and injury to that which is unavoidable in the conduct of scientifically sound research including the use of analgesic, anesthetic, and tranquilizing drugs and/or comfortable restraining devices; and 5) methods of euthanasia and reason for selection if not consistent with the AVMA Guidelines on Euthanasia.

For additional information to assist you in determining if the Vertebrate Animals section is "Acceptable" or "Unacceptable", please refer to: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/olaw/VASchecklist.pdf>.

### ***Biohazards***

Reviewers will 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.

### ***Resubmission Applications***

When reviewing a Resubmission application (formerly called an amended application), 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.

### ***Renewal Applications***

When reviewing a Renewal application (formerly called a competing continuation application), the committee will consider the progress made in the last funding period.

### ***Revision Applications***

When reviewing a Revision application (formerly called a competing supplement application), the committee will consider the appropriateness of the proposed expansion of the scope of the project. If the Revision application relates to a specific line of investigation presented in the original application that was not recommended for approval by the committee, then the committee will consider whether the responses to comments from the previous scientific review group are adequate and whether substantial changes are clearly evident.

### ***Overall Impact***

NIH peer reviewers are asked to provide an overall impact/priority 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 core review criteria, and the additional review criteria (as applicable for the project proposed).

The NIH R03 small grant supports discrete, well-defined projects that realistically can be completed in two years and that require limited levels of funding. Because the research project usually is limited, an R03 grant application may not contain extensive detail or discussion. Accordingly, reviewers should evaluate the conceptual framework and general approach to the problem. Appropriate justification for the proposed work can be provided through literature citations, data from other sources, or from investigator-generated data. Preliminary data are not required, particularly in applications proposing pilot or feasibility studies.

### **Additional Review Considerations**

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

#### ***Budget and Period Support***

Reviewers will consider whether the budget and the requested period of support are fully justified and reasonable in relation to the proposed research.

#### ***Select Agents***

Reviewers will assess the information provided in this section of the application, including 1) the Select Agent(s) to be used in the proposed research, 2) the registration status of all entities where Select Agent(s) will be used, 3) the procedures that will be used to monitor possession use and transfer of Select Agent(s), and 4) plans for appropriate biosafety, biocontainment, and security of the Select Agent(s). Select agent information is available via [http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/select\\_agent/](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/select_agent/).

#### ***Applications from Foreign Organizations***

Reviewers will assess whether the project presents special opportunities for furthering research programs through the use of unusual talent, resources, populations, or environmental conditions that exist in other countries and either are not readily available in the United States or augment existing U.S. resources.

#### ***Resource Sharing Plans***

Reviewers will comment on whether the following Resource Sharing Plans, or the rationale for not sharing the following types of resources, are reasonable:

##### ***1) Data Sharing Plan***

([http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/data\\_sharing/data\\_sharing\\_guidance.htm](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/data_sharing/data_sharing_guidance.htm)) Applications requesting more than \$500,000 direct costs in any year of the proposed research are expected to include a data sharing plan in their application. Certain Program Announcements may request a data sharing plan for all applications regardless of the amount of direct costs. Assess the reasonableness of the data sharing plan or the rationale for not sharing research data.

##### ***2) Sharing Model Organisms***

(<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-04-042.html>). All NIH grant applications are expected to include a description of a specific plan for sharing and distributing unique model organism research resources generated using NIH funding or state why such sharing is restricted or not possible. Unlike the NIH Data Sharing Policy, the submission of a model organism sharing plan is NOT subject to a cost threshold of \$500,000 or more in direct costs in any one year, and is expected to be included in all applications where the development of model organisms is anticipated.

##### ***3) Genome Wide Association Studies***

(<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-08-013.html>). Applications and proposals that include GWAS, regardless of the requested costs, are expected to include as part of the Research Plan either a plan for submission of GWAS data to the NIH designated data repository or an appropriate explanation for why submission to the repository will not be possible. 5/01/2009