

Clarification on Assessing Overall Merit and Impact for CCSG Applications

Effective with applications submitted January 25, 2009, the peer review scoring system for Cancer Center Support Grants will be consistent with new NIH policy, utilizing a broader range of merit descriptors and a 9-point rating scale, plus 'Not Recommended for Further Consideration' (For more details, see references below).

As before, site visit reviewers will consider each of the CCSG Guidelines review criteria, per component, in the determination of scientific and technical merit. They will provide an *adjectival* merit descriptor for each component, using the 9 - point scale (1 = exceptional - 9 = poor), plus 'Not Recommended for Further Consideration.'

The policy also requires an overall impact priority score to reflect assessment of the likelihood for the CCSG to exert a sustained and powerful influence on the cancer research fields highlighted in the Center's application. When evaluating the overall application, site visit reviewers will provide an *adjectival* merit descriptor and parent committee members will provide a *numerical* score for the overall impact/priority score (overall merit).

In their evaluation of the overall application, site visit reviewers and parent committee members will use the three criteria from the Guidelines (see below) as before in assessing overall impact/priority score (overall merit) of the cancer center.

Overall Merit Rating of the Cancer Center (merit descriptor)

- overall quality of the cancer-relevant science
- overall strength of the other components of the application
- extent of value added by the CCSG to the center

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In assessing overall impact/priority score (overall merit), reviewers should additionally consider, where relevant, the excerpt that follows from the CCSG Guidelines, "Reviewing Science in the CCSG." *The term 'Center' as used below should be evaluated in the context of CCSG requirements, i.e., assessment of overall impact and 'value-added' should focus on the contributions of the CCSG to the Center's organization, strategic planning, and scientific accomplishments.*

Reviewing Science in the CCSG: Science, not process, is the focus of the review. Even when process is to be specifically evaluated, such as with planning and evaluation or the ways in which flexible funds are utilized, the criteria for success are the scientific judgment behind, or consequences of, particular actions or decisions. In a CCSG review, assessment of scientific quality differs importantly from the familiar peer review of individual grants. It is not the role of peer review to re-examine individual projects that have already received fundable priority scores. Rather scientific review of a CCSG should seek to address 6 major issues:

- What is the overall quality of the science in the center?
- What impact has the center itself had (or is it likely to have) on the quality of the science, the productivity of the scientists, and the transdisciplinary activities of the institution relating to cancer?
- What has the center contributed to the development of more effective prevention, diagnosis and treatment for cancer (where appropriate)?
- Does the cancer center *add value* over and above the separately funded research efforts themselves? Have thoughtful, coherent scientific Programs been assembled and Program members selected to maximize the *cancer-related* interactive science in the parent institution as a whole?
- How do the different cancer-related scientific themes in the parent institution fit together in the center?
- Have the choices for center membership made by its leaders resulted in a group of excellent cancer -focused scientists who are also committed to productive interactions with one another?

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Ultimately, the application should reflect how the CCSG has influenced Center accomplishments, i.e., if the Center would have reported similar achievements without the benefit of the CCSG, the ‘value-added’ would be minimal and should be reflected in the overall impact/priority score (overall merit), along with an assessment of the likelihood for the CCSG to exert a sustained and powerful influence on the cancer research fields highlighted in the Centers’ application. The *numerical overall impact/priority score (overall merit)* for the application will be determined by calculating the mean score from all eligible reviewers at the parent committee meeting, and multiplying the average by 10; this overall score, ranging from 10 – 90, will be reported on the summary statement.

Comprehensive information on the NIH Enhancing Peer Review effort may be found at <http://enhancing-peer-review.nih.gov/>.

Enhancing Peer Review: The NIH Announces New Scoring Procedures for Evaluation of Research Applications Received for Potential FY2010 Funding
<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-09-024.html>