Identifying NIH Study Sections

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Session Topics

- NIH peer review overview
- Managing assignment to a specific Scientific Review Group (study section) for review
  - Identifying potential study sections
  - Verifying study section selection
  - Requesting assignment – the NIH cover letter
- Searching NIH award data for a study section and other key information
Finding a Home for Your Project

27 NIH Institutes/Centers (ICs) with different missions & priorities: your goal – match idea/science to the right NIH IC and the right Scientific Review Group (study section)!

Assignment Process

Center for Scientific Review (CSR) Division of Receipt and Referral

- Receives all (~80,000) applications/year
- Manages review of more than 70% of applications through CSR…
  - Regular Standing Study Section
  - Or Special Emphasis Panel
- Assigns the remaining applications for review by an IC…
  - Standing Committee
  - Or Special Emphasis Panel
Assignment and Review

CSR Division of Receipt and Referrals…

Makes Two Assignments (one for review, one for funding) to begin the two-tiered NIH review process

- Initial peer review
- Integrated Review Group (IRG)
- and Study section within the IRG

- Funding consideration
- NIH Institute or Center

(Dual assignment is possible.)

Second level of review
- Advisory Council

Funding decision
- Institute or Center director

Courtesy of Sally A. Amero, PhD, NIH Review Policy Officer
Office of Extramural Research

NIH Peer Review Overview

Study Section – Scientific
- Provides independent outside review
- Evaluates scientific merit, significance and scores applications
- Recommends length and level of funding

Advisory Council – Programmatic
- Assesses quality of study section review
- Evaluates Institute program priorities and relevance
- Makes funding recommendation to Institute staff

Institute Director
- Makes final funding decision based on Council input, programmatic priorities

3 - 7 months
1 - 3 months

Courtesy of Rosemarie Hunziker, PhD, Program Director, NIH Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering
CSR or Institute/Center Review?

**Referral Paths**

**CSR Review**
- **Investigator-initiated (unsolicited)**
- Most R01s, fellowships, and small business applications
- Some program announcements (PAs, PARs), requests for applications (RFAs)

**Institute/Center Review**
- IC-specific features or directions
- Program projects
- Training grants
- Career development awards
- Most RFAs

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CSR Assignment for Review

**Dual-level review assignment**

**Integrated Review Group (IRG)**
- A cluster of scientifically related study sections

**Regular Standing Study Section**
- A continuing review group or panel within an IRG
- Members with multi-year terms

**Or Special Emphasis Panel**
- Ad hoc panel convened for …
  - Special expertise
  - Elimination of conflicts of interest
  - Membership posted 30 days prior to meeting
  - May be recurring
You may request assignment to a specific…
  - IC for funding determination and
  - Scientific Review Group (study section) for peer review.

If you do not request assignment, CSR staff evaluate the following components of your grant application to make the assignment…
  - Abstract
  - Specific Aims section
  - Significance section

Align your study with an IRG and study section with the right scientific focus!

Your success hinges on…
  - Choosing well, i.e., identifying a study section most likely to appreciate your investigator-initiated research
  - Controlling the match by...
    - Requesting assignment to a specific study section and Institute—cover letter.
    - Using language in key parts (abstract, specific aims) of the proposal that corresponds to the posted descriptions of the IRG and study section.
Managing Assignment

Align your study with an IRG and study section with the *right* scientific focus!

Study CSR web pages...

- IRG descriptions (*review boundaries*) for specific study sections.
- Study section rosters

http://cms.csr.nih.gov
Each IRG is a cluster of scientifically related study sections.

Links to all special panels

IRG acronym, title, hyperlink

Link to an index of study section rosters
IRG title, acronym, description, study sections

Study sections focus

Membership, meeting rosters

Study section topics
Information only! Applicants must not communicate with reviewers either before or after review!

Roster of MESH study section members with year term on panel ends

Hyperlinks to other related study sections
Keyword "platelet"
Relevant study sections with relevance to keyword 'platelet' listed by IRG

Vascular and Hematology IRG
1. Hemostasis and Thrombosis Study Section (HTS)
   - Cellular biology, including: regulation of thrombin activity, platelet shape change, and platelet aggregation
   - Mechanisms of hemostasis: blood coagulation, structure/function of coagulation proteins, and acquired bleeding disorders
   - Proteins of platelets: regulation of blood flow and thrombosis
   - Pharmacology and toxicology: mechanisms of hemostasis and thrombosis

Cardiovascular and Respiratory Sciences IRG
1. Vascular Cell and Vascular Biology Study Section (VCB)
   - Cellular biology: regulation of blood flow and thrombosis
   - Mechanisms of hemostasis: blood coagulation, structure/function of coagulation proteins, and acquired bleeding disorders
   - Proteins of platelets: regulation of blood flow and thrombosis

Meeting roster will include name of scientific review officer (SRO).
The SRO is the NIH staff member who administers the study section and can confirm whether your project is appropriate for review by that panel.

Verifying Study Section Fit

- Once you target a study section, contact the Scientific Review Official in charge of the group to discuss your project concept.
  - Project fit with study section focus
  - Any recommendation for an alternate study section
**Contacting the SRO**

*Email the SRO to request a time to call*

*Identify…*

~Yourself, your expertise, your institution

~Your project concept, i.e., brief abstract

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**Requesting Assignment**

~ 75% of applicants include a cover letter requesting assignment!

- New cover letter format facilitates IRG/study section assignment through…
  ~Knowledge management approaches
  ~Artificial intelligence software
- Referral officer reads key sections to verify.
NIH Cover Letter Format

- List one request per line.
- Place IC and study section review requests on separate lines.
- Place positive and negative requests on separate lines.
- Include name of IC or study section, followed by a dash and acronym. No parentheses.
- Explain (justify) each request in a separate paragraph.


NIH Cover Letter Content

- Application title
- Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) # and title
- Request:
  ~ Assignment (referral) to a particular **IRG and study section**. The PHS makes the determination whether to honor the request!
  ~ Assignment to an **IC** for funding consideration
- List of individuals (e.g., competitors) **who should not review your application** and why
- Disciplines involved, if multidisciplinary
- Justification for request
  ~ Program official supporting the assignment
  ~ Key words from the IC, IRG, study section mission and scientific focus
Sample Cover Letter Format

Please assign this application to the following:

Institutes/Center
  National Institute on Aging – NIA
Scientific Review Group
  Aging Systems and Geriatrics Study Section – AGS

Please do not assign this application to the following:

Scientific Review Group
  Cancer Genetics Study Section – CG

The reasons for this request are... [provide a narrative explanation for the request(s). Include the name of the concurring program official.]

Using phrases from the study section priorities in your proposal reinforces the request!

Your Turn – Hands-On Search

Study Section Composites

Regular Standing Study Sections and Continuing SEPs
http://public.csr.nih.gov/StudySections/Standing/Pages/default.aspx

Roster Index for All Other CSR Special Emphasis Panels
http://public.csr.nih.gov/StudySections/SpecialEmphasis/Pages/default.aspx

Awarding IC Standing Committee and Special Emphasis Panels
http://era.nih.gov/roster/index.cfm
What If I’m Still Not Sure?

Verifying study section fit through…

- **Research Portfolio Online Reporting Tool (RePORT) — a Public Health Service (PHS) awards and activities database**
  
  http://report.nih.gov

RePORTER Overview

Search RePORTER for...

- Funded projects and investigators (including IC, IRG, and study section information)
- Scientific concepts
- Emerging trends and techniques

Search RePORTER for projects funded by…

- National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- Agency for Health Care Research and Quality (AHRQ)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP)
- Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
- Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)
- Office of Assistant Secretary of Health (OASH)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

http://projectreporter.nih.gov/reporter.cfm
Searching RePORTER

Search by MESH study section
Search Results

Abstract of Funded Project
Funding announcement and Institute

Abstracts of funded projects
Investigator information
Likely review group for a specific topic

Key Word Search

Keyword search for project abstract

Determine what projects by keyword were successful with various ICs or study sections…

- Abstracts of funded projects
- Investigator information
- Likely review group for a specific topic
**Funded Project Information**

**Keyword search for project abstract**

- View abstracts for general proposal structure
  - Statements on health relatedness
  - Number and structure of aims
  - Methods and approaches

**Understand agency funding priorities**
- Research volume in a given area

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**Decoding Your NIH Grant Number**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application Type</th>
<th>Activity Code</th>
<th>Institute Code</th>
<th>Serial Number</th>
<th>Support Year</th>
<th>Extension</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>R01</td>
<td>EB</td>
<td>12345</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>A1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **1 = new**
- **2 = renewal**
- **3 = supplement**
- **5 = non-competing continuation**

- **R = Research project**
- **P = Program project or Center**
- **T = Training (institutional)**
- **F = Fellowship (individual)**
- **K = Career Development**
- **U = Cooperative agreement**

- **AA = NIAAA**
- **AG = NIA**
- **AI = NIAID**
- **AR = NIAMS**
- **AT = NCCAM**
- **CA = NCI**
- **DA = NIDA**
- **DC = NIDCD**
- **DE = NIDCR**
- **DK = NIDDK**
- **EB = NIBIB**
- **EE = NIEHS**
- **EF = NEI**
- **GM = NIGMS**
- **HD = NICHD**
- **HG = NHGRI**
- **HL = NHLBI**
- **LM = NLM**
- **MD = NCMMHD**
- **MH = NIMH**
- **NR = NINR**
- **NS = NINDS**
- **RR = NCRR**
- **TW = FIC**

**A1 = first resubmission**
**A2 = second resubmission**

**Courtesy of Rosemarie Hunziker, PhD, Program Director, NIH Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering**
Activity Codes

http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/funding_program.htm

- Lists funding series and identifies individual mechanisms
  - Research Projects – R01, R03, R13, R15, etc.
  - Fellowship Programs – F05, F30, F31, etc.
  - Program Projects – P01, P20, P30, etc.
  - Career Award – K01, K08, K23, etc.

RePORTER Search Parameters

Basic keyword search

- **Search Terms**
  - Your term
- **Global Logic**
  - And
- **Grant Number**
  - 1R01%
- **Fiscal Year**
  - 2011
Evaluate IRG Information

Use CSR pages for IRG descriptions, rosters to determine…

- Scientific focus of the funding IRG
- Types of proposals reviewed
- Roster of committee members (unless an ad hoc or Special Emphasis Panel)
- Information on the SRO

Study Section Composites

Useful Web Sites

Regular Standing Study Sections and Continuing SEPs

Roster Index for All Other CSR Special Emphasis Panels

Awarding IC Standing Committee and Special Emphasis Panels
http://era.nih.gov/roster/index.cfm
Your Turn – Hands-On Search

Key in your specific research interests in the RePORTER search form to identify potential IRGs and ICs to support your study!