UT RocKs K Club
How Do Study Sections Work?
NIH Study Sections

• Applications reviewed by Scientific Review Groups (SRG’s)

• Integrated Review Groups (IRG’s)
  – Clusters of SRG’s around a scientific area
  – Assignment may be made to an IRG that then will make assignment to one of its SRG’s.

• Standing Study Sections
  – Both permanent and temporary members
  – Review most investigator-initiated applications (R01, R03, R21, R15, and K’s)
NIH Study Sections

• SBIR/STTR Study Sections
  – Review Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Technology Transfer Research (STTR) applications
  – Only Temporary Members

• Special Emphasis Panel
  – One-time or recurring panels to review applications on special topics and member conflict applications
  – Only Temporary Members
Study Section Members

- Chair
- Mix of senior and junior reviewers, usually NIH-funded investigators
- Permanent members
- Temporary members
- Scientific Review Administrator
- Grants Technical Assistant
The Meeting

- Face-to-face
- Videoconference
- Teleconference
- Internet-assisted meeting
- Usually three cycles per year for standing Study Sections
Reviewer Assignments

- Usually based on expertise
- Always consider that your grant may be reviewed by someone outside your area and write accordingly
- Access over NIH Commons IAR
- Must post reviews one week before meeting to allow reviewers to see each other’s reviews and to generate streamline list
Reviewer Assignments

• Keep in mind
  – Reviewers are busy people
  – May have to review 8-10 grants, mix of primary, secondary and tertiary reviewer roles
  – Do not make your grant a chore to read!
  – Avoid
    • Redundant/monotonous text (Break it up!)
    • Figures too small
    • Try to emphasize the novel, innovative and high impact aspects of your proposal
The Meeting

• Run by Chair assisted by SRA
• Introductions
• Explanation of process
• Reading of streamline list
  – Any streamlined application may be saved for discussion by one member of the panel
  – Streamlined applicants receive unedited critiques
• Discussion limited to 10 min per grant
  – Close scores-Less discussion
  – Wide scores-More discussion
The Meeting

- Preliminary scores from all three reviewers
- Primary reviewer concisely summarizes proposal
- Primary reviewer summarizes their critique, focusing on strengths and weaknesses
- Secondary and tertiary reviewer add any additional points
- Open discussion focused on points of disagreement
The Meeting

• Chair calls for final round of scores from reviewers
• All panel members record their scores
• Anyone scoring outside the reviewers’ range must speak up with a reason.
• Budget and RCR considerations.
A score of 5 is a good, medium-impact application. The entire scale (1-9) should always be considered.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Impact or Criterion Strength</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Exceptional</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Good</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Marginal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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Other Designations for Final Outcome

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<tr>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Abstention</td>
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<tr>
<td>CF</td>
<td>Conflict of Interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>DF</td>
<td>Deferred</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>NP</td>
<td>Not Present</td>
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<tr>
<td>NR</td>
<td>Not Recommended for Further Consideration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>Score</td>
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Remember

- Criterion scores are given to every section of the grant, including the candidate, career development plan, research plan, mentors and environment and institutional support.
- However, strong scores in all categories are not needed for the application to be judged to likely have a major impact.
- Also, mostly high criterion ratings may be given, but the overall impact score is lower because one critically important criterion is not highly rated.
Remember

• Most reviewers try to provide constructive feedback to applicants, especially if a revision is needed. Pay attention to the reviews!
• Nevertheless, a thick skin is helpful.
• Make every effort to become known to reviewers via national meetings, workshops, committees and other venues to allow connection of a face with a name and some familiarity with your work.
• Later in your career, make every effort to serve on a NIH Study Section.