



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

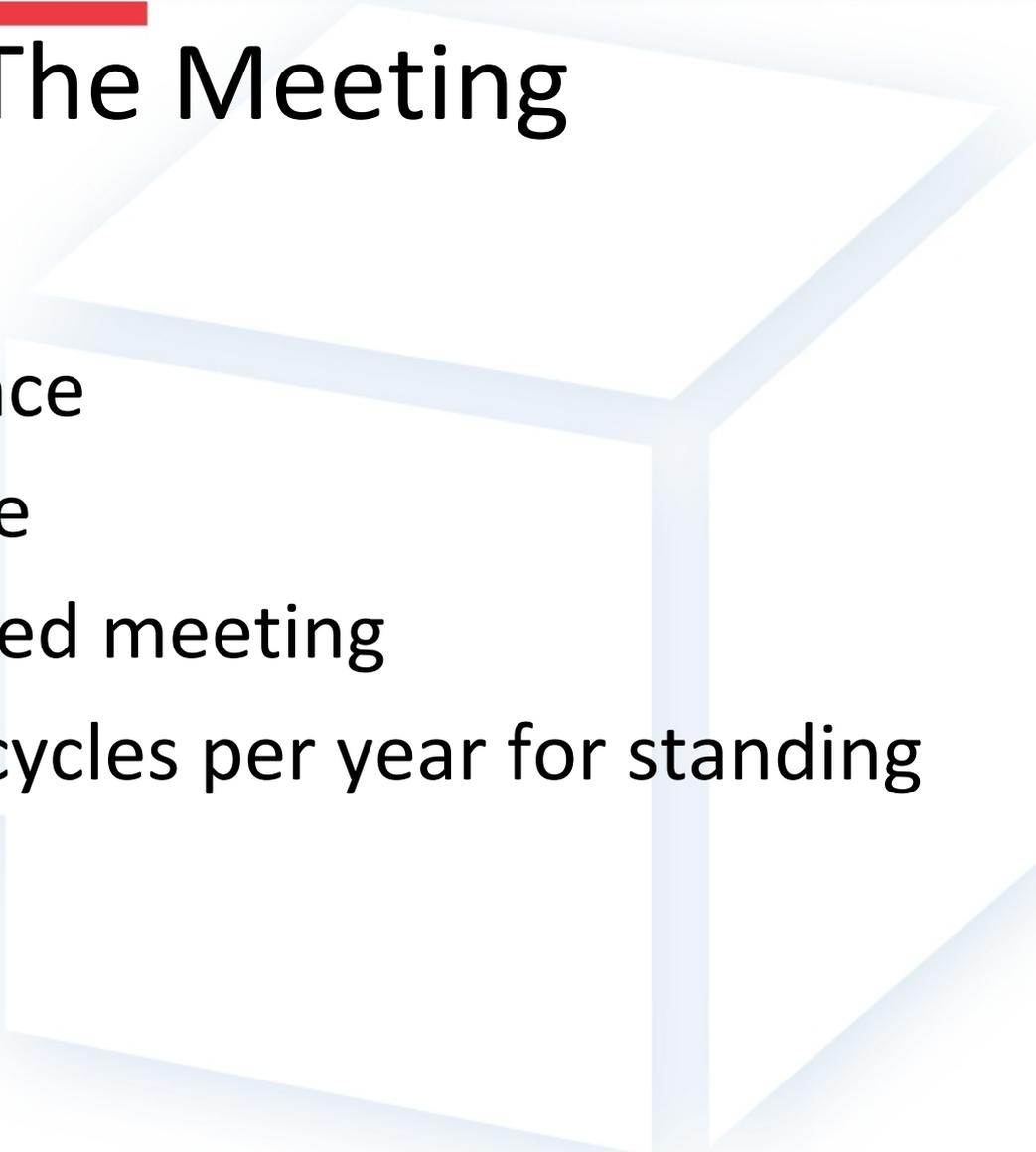


Study Section Members

- 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
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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.

Overall Impact or Criterion Strength	Score	Descriptor
High	1	Exceptional
	2	Outstanding
	3	Excellent
Medium	4	Very Good
	5	Good
	6	Satisfactory
Low	7	Fair
	8	Marginal
	9	Poor
Other Designations for Final Outcome		
AB	Abstention	
CF	Conflict of Interest	
DF	Deferred	
ND	Not Discussed	
NP	Not Present	
NR	Not Recommended for Further Consideration	

Impact	Score	Descriptor	Guidance on Strengths/ Weaknesses
High	1	Exceptional	Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
	2	Outstanding	Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
	3	Excellent	Very strong with only some minor weaknesses
Medium	4	Very Good	Strong but with numerous minor weaknesses
	5	Good	Strong but with at least one moderate weakness
	6	Satisfactory	Some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses
Low	7	Fair	Some strengths but with at least one major weakness
	8	Marginal	A few strengths and a few major weaknesses
	9	Poor	Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses



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.