

# SAMHSA GRANT REVIEW

THE MYSTERY OF REVIEW  
REVEALED

# TENETS OF REVIEW

- Each application must receive a thorough and impartial peer review
- Each application is considered and scored only in accordance with the Funding Announcement's published review criteria. An application is reviewed solely on its own merits and not compared to other applications.
- Only what is written in the application is considered. Reviewers are instructed not to make assumptions, "read between the lines" or use personal knowledge of the applicant or applicant organization.
- Review committee members are chosen for the expertise required for a comprehensive review of the applications.
- Conflict of interest standards are strictly followed.
- Confidentiality is maintained.
- A "level playing field" is maintained.
- Whether or not an application "should be" funded is never a review consideration.

# WHO IS INVOLVED

- Grant review is outsourced.
- There are 4 federal employees.
- Consult with program.

# THE PROCESS

- **SCREENING**
- Review staff screen for formatting, screen out criteria, and programmatic eligibility.
- Program staff screen for other published programmatic requirements.

# CHOOSING REVIEWERS

- Review staff will analyze the RFA for required expertise.
- Review staff will discuss the RFA with responsible program staff for suggestions as to expertise and possible reviewers.
- The RA will also use other sources to identify potential reviewers.
- In addition to expertise the RA must consider COI, diversity, geography, and review experience if any.

# FIREWALL

- There is an historic separation between the Review and Program function to avoid any appearance of COI or undue influence on the peer review process.
- Because of the above, final Review Committee rosters are not shared.

# THE REVIEW “TEMPLATE”

- A template is developed from the published review criteria.
- The template assures a degree of uniformity and assures that every element of a review criterion is considered.
- The template requires each reviewer to make both an objective and a qualitative assessment.
- Each bullet is divided into its individual elements.

# OBJECTIVE ASSESSMENT

- The reviewer determines if a response to each element is apparent in the application.
- Apparent is defined as an element responded to in the correct section and,
- Responded to in a substantive manner i.e., more than only repeating the criterion/bullet.

# QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT

- Each reviewer indicates the qualitative merit of the response using a five point Likert scale.
- The Likert scale uses five descriptors, “unacceptable,” “marginal,” “acceptable,” “very good” and, “outstanding.”

# QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT CONTINUED

- Each element, or group of like elements, receives a qualitative assessment.
- For each section (review criterion) each descriptor is also assigned a point range based on the weighted points of the review criterion.

# REVIEW IS CONDUCTED IN ONE OF THREE WAYS

- Field Review
- Telephone Review
- On-Site Review

# FIELD REVIEW

- The method most often used, particularly when there is a large number of applications to a particular RFA.
- Assigned to a committee of 3-6 reviewers, each committee reviewing about 6 applications.
- Done by mail.
- Priority scores are the mean of individual scores.
- Outliers are contacted when appropriate.

# Telephone Review

- Similar to Field Review.
- RA assesses completed reviews for areas of disagreement.
- A telephone conference is held to resolve these differences.
- Does not work well when multiple committees are needed for a large number of applications to a RFA.

# On-Site Review

- An on-site review typically uses 12-15 persons per committee, plus a chairperson.
- The committee is divided into groups of 3 called triads.
- Each triad reviews 5-6 applications.
- The reviewers in each triad are chosen according to the expertise needed for the applications assigned.

# ON-SITE, CONTINUED

- The triad develops a consensus for each element in the application.
- When consensus cannot be reached, the majority opinion is reported and the disagreement must be brought up when the full committee meets for discussion.

# FULL COMMITTEE

- Beginning mid-week, the triads assemble as a full committee.
- The meeting is run by the chairperson.
- Each triad presents its review, section by section.
- Each section is discussed by the full committee.

# SCORING

- All applications are scored on a 1-100 point scale in all 3 types of review.
- An individual reviewer's score is the sum of the section scores.
- The priority score is the mean of the individual reviewer's scores.
- For on-site reviews, each reviewer independently determines a score for each section following its discussion. No one is bound by the triad's scores.

# ROLE OF PROGRAM PERSONNEL

- For field and telephone reviews, program officers may prepare an insert, approved by the review administrator, to be included in the mailing to reviewers.
- The insert may address the intent and purpose of the funding announcement and its history.

# PROGRAM ROLES, CONTINUED

- The insert may not contain information that can be seen as influencing the review in a particular direction, make interpretations, or “correct” ambiguities.
- At a telephone review, the program representative may participate in the orientation of the committee - the rules above apply.

# PROGRAM ROLE FOR ON-SITE REVIEW

- The program representative may address the committee during its orientation and answer reviewers' questions within the guidelines previously discussed.
- The program representative is encouraged to attend the full committee meeting.

# CONTINUED

- At the meeting, the program representative may be asked questions by the review administrator or chairperson.
- The program representative may also approach the review administrator with any concerns. The review administrator will decide how the concern should be addressed.

# SUMMARY STATEMENT

- Is an objective report of the reviewers' assessment of the merits of an application.
- For field reviews, the summary statement is developed from a composite of the structured review templates and assesses each bullet of the funding announcement.
- For telephone reviews, these may be modified by the discussion.
- In addition to assessing the application's response to review criteria, the summary statement contains the application abstract, budget justification assessment, and participant protection assessment.

# SUMMARY STATEMENT, ON-SITE REVIEWS

- Reviewers in an on-site review use the template as a tool when they meet as triads.
- As triads, the reviewers develop a power point presentation of strengths and weaknesses found in the application for the full committee discussion.

# SUMMARY STATEMENTS, ON-SITE, CONTINUED

- The presented strengths and weaknesses may be modified by the full review committee after discussion.
- The modified review, after editing, becomes the summary statement.

# SUMMARY STATEMENT CONTINUED

- Summary statements are distributed to program and to the applicant.
- Summary statements go to the appropriate National Advisory Council as the second level of review when the funding announcement is for \$100,000 or more.