



# Seed Grant Review Policies

**NOTE:** Changes for the review process have been made to reflect the new NIH scoring procedures for evaluation of research applications. The changes consist of a modification in the rating scale from the current 1 to 5 scale to a 9-point rating scale (1= exceptional, 9= poor, integers only), implementation of scores for individual criteria (significance, approach, innovation, investigators and environment) and an overall (impact) score for the entire application (but not an average of the scores of the individual criteria). Scores of individual reviewers will be averaged and multiplied by 10 so the final score will range from 10 to 90. NIH is still working out the details so we will modify the policies as needed to conform. (Updated 03/16/09)

## Overview of Grant Review Process

Every AIDS Institute seed grant will be submitted in response to a published RFA. Each RFA provides a specified amount of funding for a specified research program. Prior to submission, applicants are strongly encouraged to consult with RFA PIs, Associate Directors and/or the Consultation Core. In the first stage of formal review, each grant will be peer-reviewed by two or three faculty investigators, following NIH guidelines for written reviews. The scores for each grant (except for those deemed fatally flawed) will be averaged and those grants falling above the 50th percentile for merit will move forward to the second stage of review. A committee with faculty representatives with expertise in the research represented by each RFA will review those grants in the top 50th percentile. The average scores of all committee members will be tabulated and averaged for each grant application. Grants will be funded in rank order starting from the grant receiving the highest score until funds are exhausted for any given RFA. Any grants funded outside of this process with individual faculty funds will not be considered AIDS Institute-supported research and should be clearly indicated as such.

## Mentoring and Pre-Submission Consultation

All applicants are strongly encouraged to consult with the CFAR Consultation Core (Director Gail Wyatt, [gwyatt@mednet.ucla.edu](mailto:gwyatt@mednet.ucla.edu)) or the appropriate AIDS Institute Associate Director prior to submitting an application.

## Grant Review Process

Reviewers will be selected for each seed grant application by the Principal Investigator of the RFA or, if desired, his/her faculty designee. It is understood that reviewers will be selected based upon their expertise to review any given application, as well as their objectivity and integrity in the review process. If there is a conflict of interest, (see below for Conflict of Interests) such as collaborator or mentor/mentee relationship, the PI of the RFA will recuse themselves from selecting reviewers and request that one of the other Associate Directors select reviewers for that particular application. Two or three reviewers will be selected for each application. Both of the reviewers will serve on the Grant Review committee. Individual reviewer scores will be an integer from 1 to 9. Scores of the reviews will be averaged and multiplied by 10 (see Instructions to Reviewers for scoring). Grants scoring  $\geq 60$  (needs major revision) will not be considered further. Of the remaining grants, those in the top 50th percentile will advance to the second level of review in the Grant Review committee. If there are fewer grant applications than the amount of available funding for a given RFA, applications ranked below the 50th percentile may be advanced in rank order up to the allotted funding amount, except for those grants requiring major revision or NRFC ( $\geq 60$  score). Following committee review and scoring, grants will be funded in rank order until RFA funds are exhausted. Grants receiving scores of  $\geq 60$  will not be funded.

### Example A (many applications)

RFA AAA provides \$100,000 in funding at \$30,000 per grant. 11 submissions are received and sent for review. 10 receive average scores of 12 to 55. One receives a score of 77 and is eliminated. 5 of the remaining 10 applications advance to the second level of review. Of the 5, 3 grants will eventually be funded provided the final committee score is less than 60.

### Example B (few applications)

RFA BBB provides \$100,000 in funding at \$30,000 per grant. 3 submissions are received and sent for review. They receive scores of 15, 45, and 65. The grant with a score of 65 is not considered further. Both of the other 2 move to the second level of review since the total of the budgets (\$30,000 x 2) is less than the available RFA funding.

Following committee review and vote, the final scores are 24 and 82. Only one grant will be funded since the grant receiving an 82 is deemed fatally flawed.

Instructions to Reviewers

Reviewers will be provided with a copy of the RFA so as to be aware of specific RFA guidelines. Reviewers will be provided with a copy of this document and asked to pay particular attention to the section on Conflicts of Interest.

Given that these are seed grants and so as not to burden reviewers, reviewers are instructed to be concise in their written reviews. Reviewers will follow the NIH guidelines for review ([http://www.csr.nih.gov/CDG/CD%20Guidelines/R01\\_Research\\_Grants.pdf](http://www.csr.nih.gov/CDG/CD%20Guidelines/R01_Research_Grants.pdf)), and each reviewer assigned to an application will give a separate score for each of five core review criteria (subsections in #2: Significance, Approach, Innovation, Investigators and Environment) based upon a 9-point rating scale (1 = exceptional; 9 = poor; **only integers will be used for scoring**). In addition, a preliminary impact score (also an integer) will be given by each reviewer and will determine which applications will proceed to the second level of review. Each member’s impact score will reflect his/her evaluation of the overall impact that the project is likely to have on the research field(s) involved, rather than an average of scores for each criterion. An application does not need to be strong in all five core review criteria to be judged likely to have major scientific impact.

1. Description:
2. Critique:
  - a. Significance
  - b. Approach
  - c. Innovation
  - d. Investigators
  - e. Environment
3. Protection of Human Subjects from Research Risks:
4. Gender, Minority and Children Subjects:
5. Vertebrate Animals:
6. Biohazards:
7. Other Considerations:
8. Budget:
9. Foreign:
10. Overall evaluation

*A separate score for each of five core review criteria*

**Score:**  
**Score:**  
**Score:**  
**Score:**

*Each reviewer's impact score will reflect his/her evaluation of the overall impact that the project is likely to have on the research field(s) involved, **not** a weighted average applied to the reviewer's scores given to each criterion in #2*



**Impact Score:**

**In order to ensure conformity in the review process, we will utilize a scoring system based upon merit for funding. Reviewers will be instructed to use the following scale to score applications:**

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>1</b>          | <b>The very best, absolutely must be funded.</b>   |
| <b>2, 3</b>       | <b>Excellent application, fund if there are sufficient resources.</b>  |
| <b>4, 5</b>       | <b>Good grant but needs some work</b>  |
| <b>6, 7, 8, 9</b> | <b>Needs major revision, should not be funded</b>  |
| <b>NRFC</b>       | <b>(Not Recommended for Further Consideration): Not meeting the criteria of the RFA. Lacks significant and substantial merit; presents serious ethical problems in the protection of human subjects from research risks; or presents serious ethical problems in the use of vertebrate</b> |

animals, biohazards, and/or select agents. Applications designated as NRFC do not proceed to the second level of peer review.

### Instructions for Grant Review Committee

The Grant Review committee will consist of 4-6 faculty members representing each RFA. If there are a relatively large number of grants, in order to make the most effective use of busy reviewers' time commitments, the chair of the review committee is instructed to make his/her best efforts to limit discussion of each grant. As a general guideline, it is suggested that 15 minutes be allotted for discussion of each proposal. (Amended July 19, 2006). All reviewers for each application will attend the committee meeting. Prior to 4 days before the meeting, the written comments from both reviewers will be circulated to those two attending the meeting. All grants submitted in response to each of the RFAs will be discussed by the entire committee as a block. The PI of the RFA may attend the review committee prior to review to provide any specific instructions pertinent to the goals of the RFA. Each member of the review committee will present their review. Following discussion, each eligible committee member (without conflict of interest, etc.) will give a final impact score as an integer from 1 to 9, which should reflect their evaluation of the overall impact that the project is likely to have on the research field. The impact scores assigned by each committee member will be determined primarily by consideration of the five core review criteria. However, an application does not need to be strong in all five core review criteria to be judged likely to have major scientific impact. The overall impact score for each application will be the average of all the final impact scores, multiplied by 10, i.e. 10, 11, 12, etc to 90. The averaged scores for each application will be posted following voting of all grants for a given RFA. Based upon the scores, each grant application within any given RFA will be ranked and grants will be funded in rank order, beginning with the top score (10) until funds for the RFA are exhausted.

*(Updated 08/03/07)* The Chair of the Grant Review Committee meeting has the discretion to further triage those applications that clearly will not likely be funded and limit or eliminate discussion for those very best grants that will clearly merit funding.

Any grants scored by the committee significantly different from the reviewers' original scores should be noted and a brief report by the Chair should be prepared. *(Updated 06/20/08)*

Reviewers should stay for as much of the meeting as possible. The expertise of each reviewer contributes to the overall review process when grants from different disciplines are being considered.

*(Updated 06/09/09)* All applications receiving a score <3.5 will be funded, dependent on available funds. If the application score is borderline, the applicant will be asked to address comments and the AI Leadership Group will decide on funding.

### Conflicts of Interest

The universe of potential grant reviewers and seed grant applicants at UCLA is relatively small and formal collaboration as well as collegial interaction among UCLA faculty is both desired and promoted. As such, UCLA faculty have a responsibility over and above that normally expected at NIH study sections to utilize their best judgment to remain objective and impartial when reviewing an AIDS Institute application from a fellow UCLA faculty member. Every effort should be made to avoid even the perception of potential conflicts of interest.

**The following are relationships that would result in actual and/or perceived conflicts of interest:**

- 1. Faculty engaged in active collaboration in the project described in the application, including research collaboration or provision of support in the form of funds, personnel, administrative support, supplies, etc.**
- 2. PI of a program or center and co-investigators who derive salary or research support from the PI.**
- 3. Mentor/mentee relationship, including guidance in any aspect of one's career related to or not related to the application in question. Any support in the form of research funds, supplies, personnel support, laboratory and/or office support provided by a senior investigator to a junior investigator would be considered to be a mentor/mentee relationship.**

Areas where conflicts of interest may occur and the appropriate recusal mechanism would be as follows:

A. Selection of reviewers

The PIs or their faculty designees for any given RFA funding source will be responsible for selecting the reviewers. Should there be a potential conflict, the PI should designate one of the AI Associate Directors to assist in selecting reviewers.

B. Written review of an application.

Any reviewer with a conflict of interest should recuse themselves and a new reviewer be selected.

C. Seed Grant Review committee discussion and voting.

Any committee members in conflict should recuse themselves from the discussion and voting.

Record Keeping and Award Notice

It is the intent of the AIDS Institute that the review process be as transparent as possible so that all applicants are aware of the review process and potential conflicts of interest be avoided. However, the strict confidentiality of the identity of reviewers and content of oral discussion of committee members will be maintained. Copies of all applications and correspondence with applicants should be maintained at the AIDS Institute office. If any part of the review process is administered outside of the AIDS Institute office, AIDS Institute letterhead should be utilized, such that applicants are aware that the application is undergoing the AIDS Institute review process. Similarly, award notices should be generated on AIDS Institute letterhead and signed by the Director and the PI of the respective RFA. A centralized AI spreadsheet will be maintained listing the PI and title of all submitted applications, the names of reviewers, scores, amount awarded, and status. This spreadsheet will be available for review by any Associate Director of the AIDS Institute. The identity of reviewers will not be divulged to any other individual.

Support of Projects Outside of the AIDS Institute Review Process

It is recognized that some senior investigators have grant support and/or discretionary funds that may be utilized to support projects by junior investigators and/or as part of collaborative studies. These may be in the form of support for research programs, travel, start-up support, bridge funding, etc. Support of this type is not AIDS Institute sponsored support and should not be designated in any manner as AIDS Institute funding and support. It is particularly important that the Director and Associate Directors be very clear when providing such individual private support that it not be confused with formal support sanctioned and reviewed by the AIDS Institute review process. As indicated above, the AIDS Institute sponsored support must follow the review process above and must be clearly indicated as such on correspondence to the applicant, award notices and posted on the AIDS Institute website. Conversely, the Director or Associate Directors who provide support outside of this process should never utilize AIDS Institute letterhead and should specifically indicate that the support is not provided through the AIDS Institute review process.