

IES RESEARCH GRANT SUBMISSION AND REVIEW PROCESS



IES GUIDE FOR GRANT PEER REVIEW PANEL MEMBERS

Information, tips and instructions for members of IES scientific grant peer review panels

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Introduction

This Guide includes information, tips and instructions to help you in your work as a member of an IES scientific review panel. It is a supplement to the Panel Member Agreement (PMA) that IES grant peer review panel members are asked to sign, and is focused on information that will be helpful to you as you get down to the business of reviewing applications.

RFAs are the Guiding Documents for Peer Review

IES solicits research applications through the release of requests for applications (RFAs). Each year, IES releases multiple RFAs and every application is submitted in response to one of those RFAs. The applications that are being reviewed by your panel may all have been submitted to the same RFA, or to two or more RFAs. You can access the RFAs in PRIMO from your Dashboard or by clicking on “Documents” in the blue task bar at the top of any PRIMO screen. Links to the RFAs can also be found online at ies.ed.gov/funding/.

As a panel member, perhaps the most important thing to keep in mind throughout the review process is that **RFAs are the guiding documents for application reviews**. Your primary responsibility as a peer review panel member is to review the scientific merit of applications based on the review criteria specified in the RFA to which the application was submitted.

Consistent and Transparent Review Criteria

RFAs tell applicants the criteria that reviewers are expected to use when evaluating their applications. **These criteria differ across competitions and are tied to the specific requirements and recommendations laid out in each RFA.** For example, for the two main research competitions, NCER’s Education Research Grants (CFDA 84.305A) and NCER’s Special Education Research Grants (CFDA 84.324A), reviewers are expected to assess the scientific merit of applications based on the following criteria:

- Significance
- Research Plan
- Personnel
- Resources

Each criterion is explained in the form of a question or questions that refer back to relevant sections of the RFA. For example, the Significance criterion for the two main research competitions is explained as follows: “Does the applicant provide a compelling rationale for the significance of the project as defined in the Significance section for the goal under which the applicant is submitting the application?”

Importantly, ***the review criteria that applicants see in the RFA are the same criteria that you will find in your peer review materials.***

Peer Review Information Management Online (PRIMO)

PRIMO is the web-based system developed and maintained by GDIT to facilitate the grant peer review process. PRIMO is accessed at <https://iesreview.ed.gov>. It is primarily through PRIMO that you will:

- Provide necessary personal information (contact information, tax-related information for purposes of providing your honorarium, etc.),
- Complete and submit a Panel Member Agreement (PMA; the PRIMO Document entitled “How to Complete Your Paperwork” can give you guidance on submitting your PMA),
- Receive logistical information about the panel (important dates, information about travel arrangements, etc.),
- Report potential conflicts of interest (COIs) with applications to be reviewed by your panel,
- Access applications to be reviewed by your panel,
- Electronically submit your review critiques and preliminary scores,
- Access reviews submitted by other panel members prior to the panel meeting,
- Receive other important information about your panel, such as information about triage and order of review for the panel meeting, and
- Access the online scoring system during the panel meeting.

Conflicts of Interest (COIs)

It is important that you report any real or apparent COIs through PRIMO's Declare COI function.

What Is a COI?

The Panel Member Agreement (PMA) describes six types of conflicts of interest that may arise: active participant on an application, personal relationship with applicant, close professional relationship with applicant, professional relationship with applicant's institution or organization, personal financial interest in the outcome of the review, and COIs arising from other factors that might affect objectivity. The following summarizes those different types of COIs, but please make sure to refer to the PMA when you are asked to declare COIs.

The most important thing to keep in mind is that there are COIs that could prevent you from serving on a panel at all, and there are others that would allow you to serve on a panel but not have access to or participate in the review of a particular application.

COIs that Could Prevent You from Serving on a Panel

The following is a list of COIs that could prevent you from serving on a panel that is reviewing a particular application:

- ***You are named on an application.*** You may not serve on a panel that is reviewing an application on which you are named as the PI, a co-I, one of the key personnel, a consultant, or a member of an advisory board.
- ***You are not named but contributed to the development of an application.*** If you consulted with, advised, or provided technical assistance to an applicant in any specific way (whether or not you were paid for this work), you may not serve on a panel reviewing that application.
- ***A spouse, partner, or other family member is named on an application.*** With few exceptions (for example, a 2nd cousin you see once a decade or so), you may not serve on a panel reviewing an application on which a family member is named.
- ***You have a personal financial interest in any application.*** In addition to the situation in which you are named on an application, other possible situations involving personal financial interest may include:
 - ***You have been offered a possible position on the project if funded.***
 - ***You are employed by or have a financial interest in a for-profit organization submitting an application.***

IES staff make every effort to avoid these types of COIs when initially assigning reviewers and applications to panels; however, a few do arise every year. In many cases we can make adjustments to the assignment of applications to panels that will both ensure an appropriate review of all applications and that will allow you to remain on a panel, but it is very important that we have this information as soon as possible.

COIs that Could Prevent You from Reviewing an Application

The following is a list of COIs that could prevent you from reviewing an application or being present during the panel discussion of that application, but would still allow you to serve on the panel:

- ***You have or have recently had a working relationship with someone named on the application.*** This may include people with whom you are currently collaborating on research projects, people with whom you have collaborated on research projects in the recent past, or current or recent students or supervisors.
- ***You have personal or professional disagreements with someone named on the application, or a general conceptual/theoretical disagreement with an application.*** This could involve any sort of disagreement that may reasonably be perceived as affecting your objectivity. Examples include (but are not necessarily limited to) competing conceptual, theoretical, or philosophical perspectives, or situations in which an applicant has publicly critiqued your work (or vice versa).
- ***You have or have recently had a professional connection to an organization participating in an application.*** You will have a COI with an application if you are employed by an organization that is named on the application, regardless of whether you know the individuals involved. This does not extend across campuses in large multi-campus institutions. For example, if you work at one UC campus you would NOT automatically have a COI with an application submitted by another UC campus. You may also have a COI with an application if you recently left employment at the applicant organization or if you have been or are currently in the process of discussing future employment at that organization.

Identifying and Declaring COIs in PRIMO

Once you have completed your preliminary paperwork (your PMA, etc.), you will be asked to determine whether you have potential COIs with any application(s) to be reviewed on your panel.

In PRIMO, the “Declare/Approve COIs” module will give you a list of the applications to be reviewed by your panel that identifies the individuals and institutions involved in each proposed project. You are asked to review that list and identify any potential COIs.

There is a User Guide available to you in PRIMO to show you how to enter your declarations. The Guide is entitled “How to Submit Information about/Declare a Potential COI for Grant Review Panel Members” and is available from your PRIMO Dashboard or by clicking on “Documents” in the blue task bar at the top of any PRIMO screen.

Once you have declared a potential COI, IES staff will review your declaration and will either a) confirm that you have a COI with the application, b) decide that we do NOT believe that the described relationship or situation means that you have a COI with the application, or c) ask you for more information. If IES decides that the relationship or situation you declare does not rise to the level that we would consider a COI, you may ask us to confirm it as a COI anyway if you feel that you may not be able to review the application impartially

Tips for Declaring COIs

Some COIs are straightforward and don't require more than a word or two of explanation (for example, the organization where you are employed is involved with the application).

Others are less straightforward, however. **In general, it is best for you to err on the side of over-declaring potential COIs.**

Please make sure to provide enough information in your declaration to allow IES staff to decide whether we believe that each potential COI you declare should or should not be considered a COI. If additional information is needed from you before a decision can be made, IES staff will ask for more information via a PRIMO discussion thread. You can respond directly in PRIMO.

It may cut down on the need for IES staff to follow up with you in cases where you declare a potential COI on the basis of a personal or professional relationship if your COI declaration includes information about

- How extensive the relationship is or was, and
- Whether you feel that your current or previous relationship with an individual named on an application could affect your ability to provide an impartial evaluation of that application.

The following are a few of the most common types of COI declarations that we need to follow up. If you declare potential COIs related to these relationships or situations, please make sure to let us know about the extent of the work or interaction that the relationship/situation involves and whether you feel that it could affect your objectivity:

- ***Relationships related to journal editorial and/or review work***
- ***Relationships between book editors, associate editors, and authors***
- ***Friendships.*** Usually, if you indicate that you are friends with someone, we do consider this to create a COI. However, people vary considerably in how extensively they use the term "friend" so it is helpful if you provide some additional information (for example, we do not automatically consider having a friendly but distant connection with someone to automatically create a COI)
- ***Board, panel, or committee co-membership.*** Note in particular that if you served on an IES, NSF, NIH or other grant review panel with someone named on an application, we do NOT consider this to create a COI in and of itself (although of course there could be other related factors that could result in a COI)

Examples of COI Declaration Language	
<i>Instead of This:</i>	<i>Say This:</i>
“I was on her dissertation committee about 5 years ago.”	“I was on her dissertation committee about 5 years ago, but I haven’t had any contact with her since then and I can be objective about this application;” OR “I was on her dissertation committee about 5 years ago; I have very positive feelings about her and wouldn’t be comfortable reviewing her application.”
“We worked on a project together several years ago.”	We worked on a project together several years ago, and I don’t think that I could be objective;” OR “We worked on only one project together several years ago – I could be objective.”
“We both worked on a large project that ended a few years ago.”	“We both worked on a large project that ended a few years ago, but we never worked together directly and I can be objective;” OR “We both worked on a large project that ended a few years ago; I don’t think that I can be objective.”
“We went to graduate school together.”	“We went to graduate school together and exchange emails once or twice a year, but we’re not really friends and I can be objective;” OR “We went to graduate school together; I still consider him a friend.”
“We are both editors of a journal”	“We are both editors of a journal, but we only meet a couple of times a year and don’t work together directly, so this won’t affect my objectivity;” OR “We are both editors of a journal; we talk frequently and make joint publication decisions.”
“We are professional acquaintances.”	“We are professional acquaintances; however, we interact infrequently and I can be impartial;” OR “We are professional acquaintances and I consider her a friend;” OR “We are professional acquaintances and recently discussed ideas that appear to be the basis for this application” [NOTE: this 3rd possibility may create a conflict of interest of the type that would need to be resolved by removing either the application or you from the review panel.]

Confidentiality and Nondisclosure

The PMA discusses our confidentiality and nondisclosure policy. In short, please treat all application materials, panel members' comments, and panel proceedings and recommendations confidentially. Do not discuss them with applicants or anyone who is not involved in the review process before, during, or after the review panel meetings.

In addition, in order to avoid a situation where you may inadvertently say something about an application in the presence of someone who has a COI with that application, ***it is important that you not discuss the review of any application at any time other than when that application is being actively discussed at the panel meeting*** – not in the panel meeting room, not in other areas of the hotel where the panel is meeting, and not at an airport or train station on your way to or from the panel meeting. You never know who might be listening!

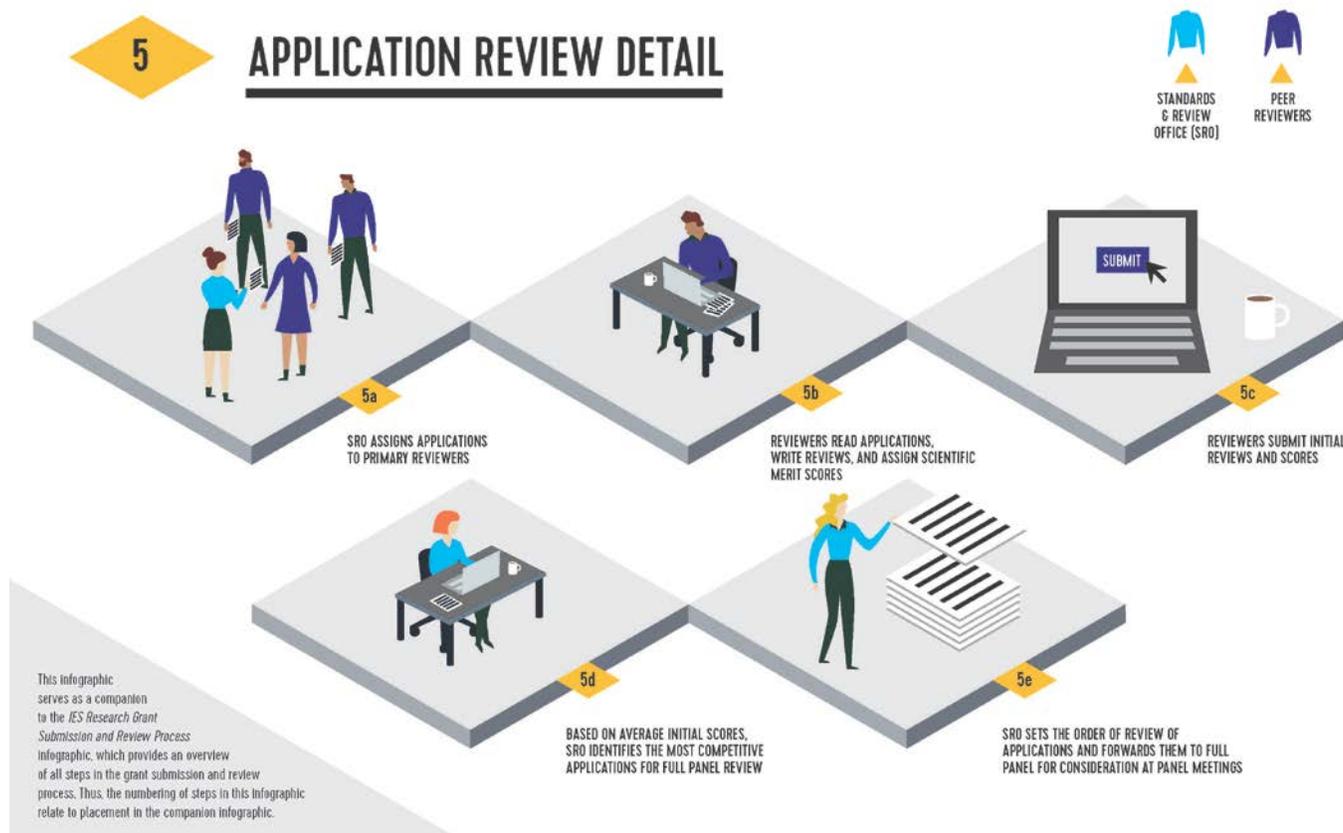
Misconduct in Science

The PMA also discusses policies and procedures related to potential misconduct on the part of applicants. Although rare, reviewers do sometimes raise concerns about potential plagiarism or other forms of misconduct.

Prior to the panel meeting, if you suspect misconduct on the part of an applicant please bring it to the attention of the Scientific Review Officer (SRO) for your panel; he or she will bring this information to the attention of GDIT and IES, and the potential issue(s) will be investigated. IES' general policy is that potential misconduct should be investigated separately from the peer review process. To that end,

- If you are an assigned reviewer for the application, please continue to review it on its merits; as much as possible, please try to disregard the potential misconduct in your evaluation.
- If the application goes forward for panel discussion, please do not raise issues related to potential misconduct during the panel meeting.
- If concerns about an application related to possible misconduct do arise at the panel meeting, the SRO will make note of the concerns for subsequent investigation; the panel should then proceed with the evaluation of the scientific merit of the application.

The Peer Review Process Before the Panel Meeting: Getting Set Up and Reviewing Applications



After you have completed your preliminary paperwork (including your PMA), the review process begins when GDIT asks you to declare any potential conflicts of interest (COIs). You must confirm that you have completed your COI declarations before applications will be available for you to review, so it is important that you complete your declarations as quickly as possible. (More information about COIs – what constitutes a COI and how to declare potential COIs – can be found in the “Conflicts of Interest (COIs)” section earlier in this Guide.)

After COIs have been declared, IES staff assign primary reviewers for each application. For most panels, either two or three panel members are assigned as primary reviewers for each application, although for some competitions additional primary reviewers may be assigned. Once this is done, your SRO will send out an email letting you know that the assignments and review materials are available to you in PRIMO, and you can begin reviewing your assigned applications.

In addition to this Guide, the materials that are available to you in PRIMO include:

- Requests For Applications (RFAs)
- Reviewer Materials that provide additional instructions, information, and tips for reviewing that are specific to your review panel
- Applications. You will have access to all applications to be reviewed on your panel except those for which you have declared COIs.
- Your review assignments. A list of the applications that you are assigned to review.
- Reviewer critique templates for each of your assigned applications.

The SRO for your panel will let you know the deadline for submitting your critiques and scores. ***It is very important that you submit your reviews on or before that deadline so that final decisions about the panel meeting (such as triage decisions, synthesizer assignments, and orders of review) can be made and shared with all panel members in a timely manner.***

Writing Critiques

Reviewers' critiques are the most important documents created as part of the review process: they document reviewers' evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses of each application, and they are included in the scientific merit evaluation summary statements that go back to applicants once the peer review process is complete.

Review Applications On Their Own Merits

Please evaluate each application you are assigned to review based on its own merits, and not relative to other applications you review (or to any other applications being reviewed by your panel). In other words, ***IES would like you to consider the elements that you would expect to see in a strong application, and to evaluate the quality of each application you review against that standard (see below for more information).***

What is a strong application? Focus on RFA Requirements and Recommendations

The RFAs each include "Recommendations for a Strong Application" for each of the relevant review criteria, and make it clear to applicants that peer reviewers are asked to consider these recommendations in their evaluations of applications. ***Thus, we ask you to carefully consider the recommendations laid out in the RFA, in conjunction with your professional judgment and expertise, as you review your assigned applications.***

Sections of Your Critique: An Overall Description, Review Criteria, and a Summary

Overall Description. Your written critique begins with an overall description of the proposed research project. This description should be a brief, non-evaluative summary written in your own words; please do not use a verbatim selection from the application itself.

Review Criteria. The next sections of the critique template are where you provide your evaluation of the major strengths and weaknesses of the application with respect to each of the review criteria. For

each criterion, and for both strengths and weaknesses, your comments should include enough information for readers (including other panel members and the applicants themselves) to understand the aspects of the application that you found to be particularly strong, or particularly weak.

As noted earlier, your panel may review applications submitted to one RFA, or to multiple RFAs. ***Please make sure that you know which RFA is relevant for each application you review, and evaluate it according to the requirements and recommendations contained in that RFA.***

Where can I find information about application competition, topic, and goal in PRIMO?

- Click on “Peer Review” in the blue task bar, and then on “Critiques” in the drop-down menu. You should see competition and (where relevant) topic and goal information for all of your assigned applications.
- Each individual critique template includes a header that identifies the competition, topic, and goal for the application.
- Applications should also include topic and goal information in several locations; unfortunately, not all applications are as clear as they should be about their intended topic and/or goal. In such cases, GDIT follows up with applicants and assigns application topics and goals based on this follow-up communication; so, the topic and goal information that you see in PRIMO should be accurate.
- If you can’t find topic or goal information or if you find conflicting information (for example, the critique form indicates one topic while the application mentions a different topic), please contact your SRO for clarification before you proceed with your review of that application.

Summary. The last section of the critique template asks you to provide an integrated summary of your overall assessment of the scientific merit of the application.

Applications That Are Resubmissions

Most panels review some applications that are resubmissions (revisions of applications that were submitted previously).

If an application is a resubmission, the applicant is required to include an Appendix B in which they describe how they responded to the previous review. In addition, the review summary statement (including the previous reviewers’ critiques and, if the application went to a full review panel for discussion, a summary of the panel discussion and the final average criterion and overall scores from the prior review) will be attached at the end of the application pdf for you to read.

If you are assigned to review a resubmitted application, please address whether – and how successfully – the applicant responded to prior reviewers’ comments (this does not mean, however, that you cannot raise new or additional concerns about the application you are reviewing).

How can I tell whether an application is a resubmission?

- Resubmitted applications are flagged in PRIMO with an icon (the letters RE in a yellow circle) next to the application number.
- Each individual critique template indicates whether the application is a resubmission or a new application.
- Resubmissions are required to include a statement in Appendix B describing how the applicant responded to the previous critiques.
- If an application is a resubmission, the review summary statement from the prior review will be appended at the end of the application pdf.
- If you have questions about a particular application, please contact your SRO for clarification before you proceed with your review.

Additional Tips and Recommendations for Review Critiques

What you write should clearly and constructively present your overall evaluation of the scientific merit of an application, along with the elements of the application that led you to reach that evaluation. Your critique will become part of the feedback that goes to applicants and it will also be viewed by your fellow panel members. Particularly for applications that are not recommended for funding, applicants may choose to revise and resubmit their applications; having descriptive, clear and constructive feedback can be helpful in the process of revision.

- **Use complete sentences that clearly convey your thinking.** Single-sentences or phrases are usually inadequate. For example, unless you truly have no concerns, please do not describe your evaluation of the weaknesses related to a review criterion with a statement such as “no major weaknesses,” or “the resources appear adequate.”
- **Be specific.** Your comments should refer to relevant, specific aspects of the application.
- **Avoid using derogatory or offensive language.** Please avoid unnecessarily harsh or personal language. If you would be personally offended by a comment, it is reasonable to expect that the applicant whose work you are evaluating would also be offended.
- **Avoid saying that an application is “nonresponsive” to the RFA.** IES reserves the use of the term “nonresponsive” to refer to applications that do not meet the minimum **requirements** laid out in the RFA (including competition requirements and, if relevant, topic and goal requirements). All applications that you are assigned to review have made it through an initial screening and have been deemed to be at least minimally responsive to those requirements. Instead of referring to an application as “nonresponsive,” it would be helpful if you would express your concerns in terms of how well or poorly the application fits, or clearly addresses, the RFAs requirements and recommendations.
- **Please avoid making specific recommendations to applicants that they resubmit to a different competition, topic and/or goal.** For example, please do not suggest that perhaps an Exploration goal project should be revised and resubmitted as a Development and Innovation project. Instead, it would be more helpful to talk about the apparent lack of fit to the topic or goal under which the application was submitted (why it might not fit very well), or to suggest that the applicants may need to clarify how the project fits into the intended topic or goal.

- ***Please comment on the strengths and weaknesses of applications as they are submitted, and avoid trying to rewrite applications.*** Please avoid making overly-specific recommendations for changes in the research questions, research design, data analysis plan, personnel, etc. It is up to the applicant to decide if and how to revise an application for resubmission based on the feedback they receive.

Scoring Applications

In addition to writing a critique of each application to which you are assigned as a primary reviewer, you are asked to provide two different types of scores for each application: **Criterion Scores** for each of the Review Criteria, and an **Overall Score**.

Criterion Scores

You are asked to rate each application for which you are a primary reviewer on each of the review criteria. These **Criterion Scores** are on a scale of 1 to 7, using whole numbers. **Higher scores are more positive - 7 is the most positive score, while 1 is the most negative.** Intermediate values on the scale should be treated as equal steps along the scale. When considering your criterion scores, please make sure that they are well-aligned with the narrative critique you have provided for each criterion.

Criterion Score Range	Narrative Review Comments
6 or 7	Your evaluation with respect to a criterion (significance, research plan, personnel, resources, etc.) is very positive; your critique includes numerous major strengths and few or no major weaknesses
3, 4, or 5	Your evaluation with respect to a criterion is mixed; your critique includes both some major strengths and some major weaknesses
1 or 2	Your evaluation with respect to a criterion is generally negative; your critique includes many major weaknesses and few if any major strengths

Overall Scores

You are also asked to provide an **Overall Score** for each application that you review; this score summarizes your overall view of the quality of the application. Overall Scores are on a scale of 1.0 to 5.0. Unlike the Criterion Scores, Overall Scores are available in tenths (1.0, 1.1, 1.2...4.9, 5.0).

In contrast to the Criterion Scores, please note that numerically lower scores are more positive scores – 1.0 is the most positive score, while 5.0 is the most negative score. The following chart shows the relationship between the numeric overall scores and their adjectival equivalents.

Overall Score Range	Adjectival Equivalent
1.0 to 1.5	Outstanding
1.6 to 2.0	Excellent
2.1 to 2.5	Very Good
2.6 to 3.0	Good
3.1 to 4.0	Fair
4.1 to 5.0	Poor

How do the Criterion and Overall Scores Relate to Each Other?

The Overall Score that you give to an application should reflect your evaluation of the application as a whole. It is very important for you to make sure that your overall score for an application is well-aligned with both your narrative review and the criterion scores that you provided for that application.

This does not mean, however, that there is a one-to-one correspondence between criterion scores and overall scores. Criterion scores are not averaged or mathematically manipulated to determine an overall score. Rather, IES asks you as a reviewer to please carefully consider the strengths and weaknesses of the application as reflected in your criterion scores and narrative review when assigning an overall score to each application.

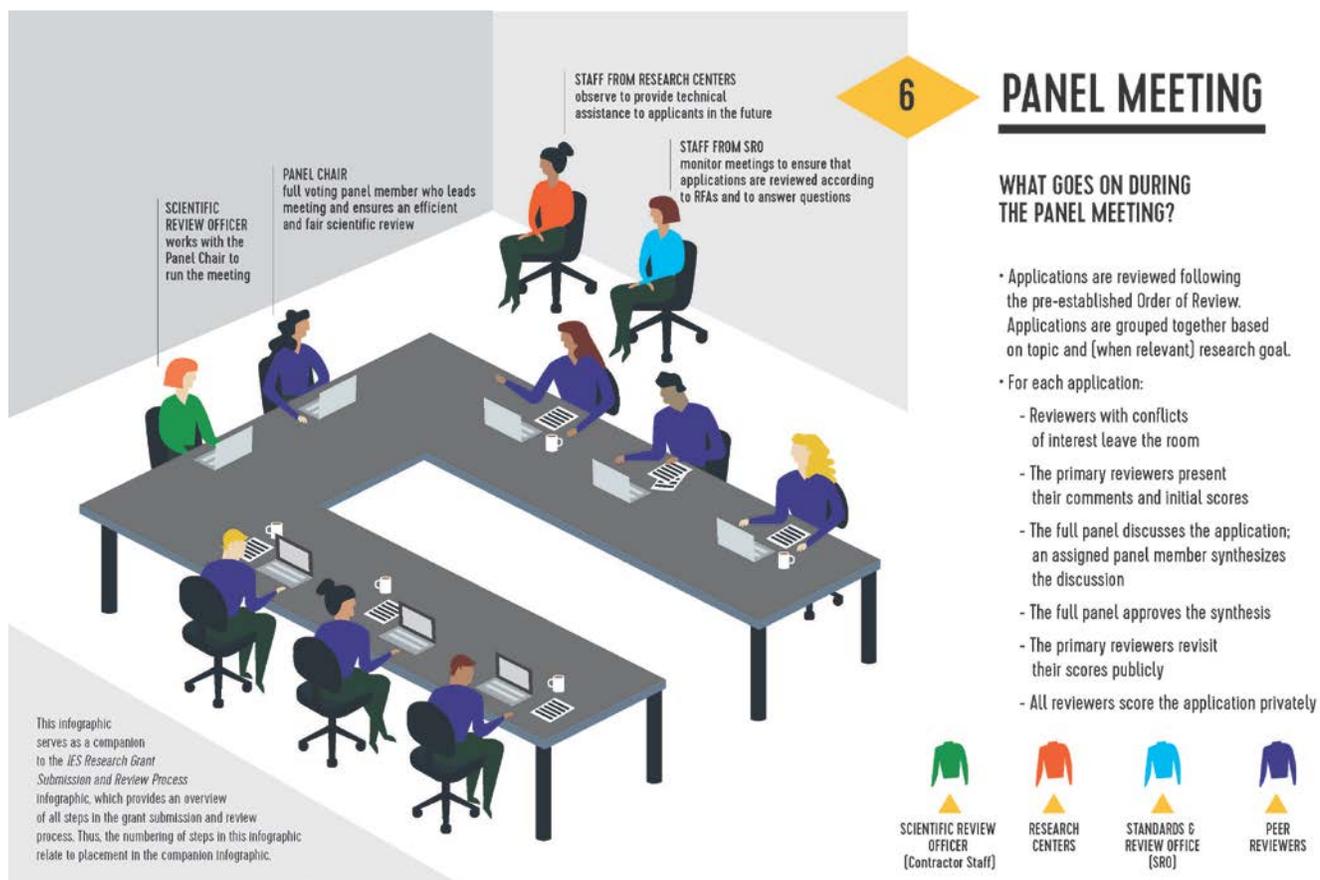
Submitting Reviews and Final Steps Before the Meeting

As mentioned earlier, your scores and written reviews will be due in PRIMO prior to the panel meeting. The exact amount of time between the review submission deadline and the panel meeting varies, but for most panels is about two weeks. This allows IES and GDIT staff to work together to complete the planning for the meeting. The following activities take place during the time between the review submission date and the meeting itself:

- **Triage.** For most panels, IES staff will conduct a triage process. This involves rank ordering all of the applications reviewed by the panel based on average overall scores, and identifying the most competitive applications to send forward for full panel discussion.
- **Notification of applications to be discussed.** Once triage is complete, GDIT will notify you of which applications will be discussed by the panel.
- **Order of Review.** Shortly after identifying which applications will be discussed by the full panel, you will receive information about the order in which those applications will be discussed. The Order of Review will also indicate which panel members have been assigned to synthesize the panel discussion for each application. IES staff members make these determinations.
- **Familiarize yourself with all applications to be discussed.** Once you receive the information about which applications will be discussed, please make sure to take a look at those applications and the primary reviewers' critiques. You should be familiar enough with the applications that, after the primary reviewers' presentations and the full panel discussion, you will feel comfortable providing criterion and overall scores for each application (other than those with which you have a COI).

- ***Consider whether you want to nominate a triaged application back for panel discussion.*** Occasionally, a reviewer notices that an application that he or she thinks has substantial scientific merit has been triaged out and is not slated to go forward for full panel discussion. If you feel strongly that a triaged application should be discussed by the panel, you can nominate that application back for consideration. A call for nominations is made at the beginning of the panel meeting, but it is helpful if you let your SRO know that you intend to nominate a particular application prior to the panel meeting.

Reviewing Applications: What Happens At the Panel Meeting?



The following is a brief summary of what happens at a grant review panel meeting. Some of these activities differ for panels that meet via video teleconference, or for panels that meet (in person or virtually) off-cycle. The general format for panel meetings remains the same, however.

Preliminaries: a Plenary Session

In most cases, multiple review panels are convened at the review meeting. At the beginning of the meeting, the IES Deputy Director for Science conducts a short plenary session for all reviewers in attendance. Typically the plenary session includes some information about IES' grant programs and grant peer review, and important reminders regarding the review process.

The Panel Meeting

After the plenary session, panels convene in separate meeting rooms. Your panel's SRO and the panel Chair will direct the panel meeting with assistance from a Review Technical Assistant (RTA).

Calling for Nominations of Triaged Applications

After preliminary introductions and explanations of materials, technology, and procedures, the panel Chair will ask if anyone would like to nominate any triaged applications that they believe should be discussed at the meeting. If a nomination is made, the nominator will be given the opportunity to explain very briefly (no more than a couple of minutes) why he or she thinks that the application should be discussed. After each nomination, the full panel will vote. If a simple majority of the panel votes to bring the application back for discussion, it will be added to the Order of Review on the second day of a two-day panel or at the end of a one-day panel.

Discussing Each Application

Applications will be discussed following the Order of Review that you received prior to the panel meeting. Unforeseen circumstances do sometimes require revisions to the Order either before or during the panel meeting, however, so be sure to pay attention to any changes that the SRO and Chair announce at the meeting.

- **Reviewers with COIs leave the room.** Before discussion of an application begins, the SRO and RTA will ask reviewers with COIs to sign out and leave the room. Any reviewers who are out of the room because of an earlier COI will be brought back. If you have not declared a COI with an application but realize at the time of the meeting that you are in conflict, inform the SRO immediately, sign out with the RTA and leave the panel room. **Be sure to do this as soon as you realize that you have a COI, even if it is after the discussion has begun.**
- **Scores will be posted.** Once all panel members with COIs have left, the RTA will post the primary reviewers' criterion and overall scores for the application – along with the application number and an indication of whether the application is a resubmission – so that they are visible to all panel members during the discussion.
- **The Chair opens the discussion.** As the scores are being posted by the RTA, the Chair will call out the application number, competition, topic, goal, PI, and title of the application to be discussed. The Chair will also alert the panel if the application is a resubmission. The Chair will then call on the first reviewer to begin.
- **The primary reviewers present their critiques.** The first reviewer describes the proposed research and presents a summary of its strengths and weaknesses. The second reviewer elaborates on areas of agreement or disagreement with the first reviewer and offers additional comments. If additional reviewers are assigned to the application, their comments follow the second reviewer.
- **The full panel discusses the application.** After all primary reviewers have presented their critiques, the discussion is opened to the full panel. Panel members can ask questions or provide additional comments on the application.
- **The synthesizer reads his or her summary of the panel discussion.** During the full panel discussion of each application, an assigned synthesizer writes a summary of the discussion. After discussion has ended, the synthesizer then reads his or her summary, the panel gives feedback, any necessary changes are made, and the synthesis is finalized. More information about synthesizing is provided below.
- **Budget and administrative notes.** If the panel recommends any budget or administrative notes to IES about an application, these are recorded by the panel SRO. The SRO will read these notes

aloud for panel approval. This typically happens for only a few applications during a panel meeting.

- **The primary reviewers revisit their scores.** The primary reviewers have the opportunity to change their criterion and overall scores to reflect changes in their views of an application after full panel discussion. Primary reviewers post their revised scores and talk through their changes for the panel.
- **All panel members score the application.** All panel members present for the discussion of an application privately enter criterion scores and overall scores for the application using PRIMO's Online Scoring Module.
- **Discussion ends and the panel moves to the next application.** Once all scores have been submitted, the posted scores are removed from view, reviewers who were out of the room due to COIs are called back, and the panel begins the process for the review of the next application.

Editing Critiques After Panel Discussion

If you are a primary reviewer for an application, you may revise your written critique following panel discussion. Particularly when your criterion and overall scores change, please make sure that your critique fits with your revised scores.

Generally, reviewers can edit their critiques at any time during the panel meeting. If you decide or are asked to revise your critique, it is important to remember a couple of things:

- Please do so during a time when you are on a break from the meeting (a snack break, a lunch break, out of the room due to a COI, or in the evening). Please DO NOT work on revising a critique when you are in the panel room and another application is being discussed.
- Please be aware of the need to maintain confidentiality as you edit your critique.

Synthesizing

For all applications discussed by the full panel, syntheses of panel discussions are included in the summary statements provided to applicants, as are the primary reviewers' narrative reviews and the final scientific merit scores (average overall and criterion scores). Syntheses are intended to provide feedback for the applicant regarding key points raised by panel members following the primary reviewers' presentations of their critiques.

Synthesizing Assignments are Distributed Among Panel Members

A synthesizer will be assigned for each application to be discussed by the panel who is not one of the primary reviewers for the application. Assignments are made after reviewers' critiques and scores have been submitted and triage has been completed.

Generally, responsibilities for synthesizing discussions of applications are distributed among panel members so that each reviewer has a small number of syntheses to complete (typically between one and three per panel member).

- Some panel members enjoy doing review syntheses and are particularly good at doing so. ***If you are interested in taking on additional synthesis responsibilities (anywhere from a few more***

than most reviewers to all of the syntheses for the panel), please let your SRO or the IES staff person working with your panel know. IES would be happy to accommodate such requests.

- In contrast, some panel members are uncomfortable with synthesizing or may for a variety of reasons feel unable to synthesize panel discussions. **If you do not want to be assigned synthesis responsibilities, please let your SRO or the IES staff person working with your panel know and we will avoid assigning you to synthesize any application discussions.**

Synthesis Procedures

Synthesizer assignments are shown in the Order of Review available in PRIMO. Before the meeting, please take a look at the applications for which you have been assigned as synthesizer, and to the primary reviewers' critiques. This will help you to listen to the discussion and to focus your synthesis on points of discussion that may not have been raised by the primary reviewers.

Panel syntheses are submitted through PRIMO. During the meeting, GDIT staff will provide instructions on how to enter syntheses into PRIMO.

After an application is discussed, the panel Chair will ask the assigned synthesizer to read his or her summary out loud to the panel. Panel members may then suggest changes if needed to capture the key substantive points that were raised during the panel discussion. **Panel members do not need to worry about wordsmithing the synthesis (except as needed to clarify the intended meaning).**

Synthesis Content

Syntheses do not need to be long. They may include a) comments regarding both strengths and weaknesses of the application, b) major areas that an applicant should focus on in a resubmission, and c) any major points about which reviewers disagreed (if applicable).

Syntheses should focus on the full panel discussion. The synthesis does not need to include a summary of the application or points raised by the primary reviewers in their narrative reviews, except to the extent that they are discussed by the panel **and new or additional perspectives are raised regarding these points.**

- You do not need to summarize the primary reviewers' comments; rather, please focus on the discussion that follows the primary reviewers' presentations.
- It is not necessary to capture every comment or question raised by the panel.
 - Points of clarification that are asked and answered do not need to be included.
 - Comments that echo but do not expand on comments already raised by the primary reviewer do not need to be included.
- As long as what is written clearly conveys the intended meaning, you do not need to worry about writing perfect sentences or paragraphs.

Syntheses begin with a standard opening statement. To facilitate the work of the panel, IES uses a standard opening statement for all syntheses. This statement indicates that the primary reviewers presented their critiques to the panel, referencing all of the relevant review criteria for the competition and topic to which the application was submitted, and that the panel then discussed the application. Synthesizers should add any additional comments that are warranted by the panel discussion.

Text that Precedes Panel Syntheses in Summary Statements

“At the panel session, the primary reviewers presented their individual critiques of the application. The panel listened to the primary reviewers’ discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the research plan and to their evaluation of the significance of the proposed project, the qualifications of the research team, and the adequacy of the resources. After hearing the primary reviewers’ perspectives, the panel discussed the following aspects of the application.”

Note: This example reflects the review criteria for the Education Research Grants and Special Education Research Grants competitions. For other competitions and topics, this statement is modified to reflect the appropriate review criteria (for example, partnership or training criteria).

Examples of Statements or Phrases That Might Be Used in Syntheses

Below are examples of stock statements or phrases that you might find useful to have on hand as you are writing your panel syntheses during the meeting.

Examples of text for a resubmission:

- There were sections of this resubmitted application that were not seen as sufficiently responsive to the comments received in the previous review.
- Several panel members expressed the view that this resubmitted application was highly responsive to the comments of the previous reviewers.

Examples of statements about major areas for revision:

- The panel felt that it was not clear that there was sufficient expertise related to _____ on the project.
- The application would benefit from greater clarity about _____.
- The addition of expertise on _____ would strengthen the project team.
- The _____ was underdeveloped in the application and should be described with greater specificity.

Examples of Statements or Phrases That Might Be Used in Syntheses, continued

Dealing with positive or negative points perceived as important enough to include in the synthesis by some reviewers, but where some panel members also disagreed:

- Some reviewers were concerned that _____, but others were less concerned about this because _____.
- Reviewers disagreed as to the extent to which this resubmitted application was responsive to the previous reviews. Some reviewers believed _____, while others still felt that _____.
- The use of _____ was discussed as a particular strength, although panel members disagreed on _____.

Other examples:

- A number of panel members noted _____ as a potential weakness of the project.
- The panel echoed many of the strengths of the project identified by the primary reviewers, and added _____ and _____ as particular strengths.
- Several panel members expressed enthusiasm about _____.
- Panel members felt that the significance of the project may be limited because _____.

After the Panel Meeting

Once the review panel meeting has ended, your service for the review session is complete. Be sure to follow any instructions given to you by GDIT about discarding paper or electronic copies of proprietary materials.

Please feel free to contact IES or GDIT staff who you worked with during your participation if you have any questions. Thank you for participating on an IES grant peer review panel. We appreciate your service!

Appendix

Additional Information on IES' Research Application Review Process

In 2006, the National Board for Education Sciences approved procedures for the peer review of grant applications, which are described in the Procedures for Peer Review of Grant Applications document (http://ies.ed.gov/director/sro/peer_review/application_review.asp). IES' Standards and Review Office, housed within the Office of the Director, is responsible for the scientific peer review process. In order to ensure that peer review is as objective as possible, peer review activities and staff are purposefully situated outside of the research centers that provide technical assistance to applicants, fund the research, and work with grantees. The Standards and Review Office works with a contractor that handles logistics, develops and maintains the on-line peer review system, and produces scoring and other needed reports. The Standards and Review Office is responsible for the major substantive activities involved in the review process, including annual planning regarding the number and types of panels needed, identifying and recruiting reviewers, assigning applications to panels, assigning reviewers to applications, preparing substantive instructions and information for reviewers and panel chairs, and conducting triage after initial scores have been submitted. Standards and Review Office staff members also attend the panel meetings in order to address any questions or issues that arise, and to ensure that the panels are reviewing applications according to the requirements and review criteria in the RFAs. IES program officers may attend the panel meetings as observers, but are not involved in managing the review process or working with the panels.

Types of Panels

The Standards and Review Office constitutes two types of review panels: **standing panels and single-session panels**. Standing panels are established for areas or topics that are competed on a regular basis, while single-session panels are constituted as needed to cover unique competitions or competitions that are run on a less frequent or regular basis.

Currently, there are **eight standing review panels**:

- Basic Processes
- Early Intervention and Early Childhood Education
- Education Systems and Broad Reform
- Mathematics and Science
- Reading, Writing, and Language Development
- Social and Behavioral
- Special Education
- Statistics and Modeling

Types of Reviewers

Standing panels include principal members and may also include rotating and ad hoc members. Single-session panels include rotating members who are generally experienced IES reviewers, and they may also include ad hoc members.

Principal members. Principal members are appointed to serve 3-year terms on a review panel (when a new standing panel is initially established, principal members are appointed for terms ranging from 1 to 3 years, so that there are principal panel members rotating on and off of the panel each subsequent year). Individuals are typically appointed as principal panel members following participation as rotating panel members. The Director of IES reviews and approves all appointments of principal panel members. In order to promote continuity in standards and procedures across review sessions, at least 50 percent and up to 100 percent of the members of a full standing panel are principal members (panels typically include a total of about 20 reviewers). Principal panel members are expected to serve for each meeting of the panel that is held during the member's term. However, for a particular panel review meeting, if a principal panel member has a COI or schedule conflict that prevents service on the panel, the Standards and Review Office may assign that individual to serve on an alternate panel, as appropriate.

Rotating members. Rotating members are appointed to serve on a particular panel for one or two review sessions. Rotating members are recruited to supplement the expertise needed on a panel, and to allow panels to efficiently handle the number of applications received. In addition, rotating membership provides a trial opportunity for an individual to participate on a panel, allowing both the Standards and Review Office and the reviewer to evaluate the fit of the individual on the panel prior to a potential appointment as a principal member. Both principal and rotating members serve as full members of the panel; they are assigned full loads of applications to review, attend panel review meetings, and score all applications considered by the panels on which they participate (except those for which they have conflicts of interest).

Ad hoc members. Ad hoc members are appointed as needed to serve on a particular panel for one review session, and are typically assigned between 1 and 4 applications to review. They have access only to their assigned applications, and participate in the full panel meeting only for the discussion and scoring of those applications for which they serve as primary reviewer (if those applications go forward to the full panel after triage). Ad hoc members typically participate in the meeting via teleconference. Ad hoc reviewers are recruited when the number of applications received is greater than what a panel can efficiently handle or when a particular area of expertise is needed for a small number of applications. Typically, no more than 3 or 4 ad hoc members are used to supplement a panel.

The Roles of Peer Review Panel Participants

Scientific Review Officer

GDIT recruits Scientific Review Officers (SROs) from an extensive resource pool of highly skilled professionals who possess years of experience in peer review procedures as well as knowledge of education and behavioral research. These scientists possess an array of expertise and experience that represents a broad range of scientific, administrative, and technical support skills related not only to peer review but also to administration and grant and contract management of Federal programs. The SRO is a nonvoting member of the peer review panel who exerts a critical leadership role in the peer review process. The SRO has the overall responsibility to ensure that the panel proceedings are accurately recorded and that the integrity of the review process is maintained.

The SRO will carry out the following specific responsibilities:

- Accept ultimate responsibility for the panel, conducting its business in accordance with established IES and GDIT policies and procedures governing scientific peer reviews.
- Ensure that apparent or actual COIs are managed appropriately.
- Serve as a liaison between the panel chairperson and panel members regarding technical and administrative issues as well as explain review policies and procedures.
- Ensure that all reviewers complete and submit preliminary scores and reviewer comments by the announced due date before the peer review session.
- Work closely with the Review Technical Assistants (RTAs) to ensure the adequacy, appropriateness, and efficiency of logistical requirements for the panel meeting.
- Open the review meeting with a clear and succinct introduction and set out the meeting agenda and IES and GDIT policies and procedures.
- Provide an overview of specific instructions, panel meeting policies, and protocols and allow for divergent points of view.
- Conduct the review meeting in concert with the panel chairperson and in accordance with IES and GDIT review policies and procedures.
- Advise the chairperson during the panel meeting on what actions the panel might take or is prohibited from taking.
- Note budgetary and administrative information that needs to be provided to IES.

Panel Chair

For each panel, IES appoints a panel chair. For standing panels, chairs are typically selected from among the principal members of the panel. Panel chairs are selected based on the following:

- Their standing in the scientific community (including prior experience with leadership roles, such as serving as chair of an academic department),
- Prior experience on IES grant review panels,
- Willingness to become thoroughly familiar with relevant RFAs and to ensure that the panel reviews the merits of the applications according to the criteria in the RFAs,
- Willingness and ability to provide leadership and guidance to the panel deliberations (including balancing the need for each reviewer to be able to have his or her perspective heard with the need to ensure appropriate use of time such that each application is reviewed fairly).

The panel chairperson works closely with the SRO, presides at the meeting, and provides leadership in moderating and guiding panel members in their scientific deliberations. The chairperson plays a key role in ensuring that each application receives a fair review on the basis of its merit. The chairperson, unlike the SRO, participates fully in the scientific review of applications and votes on each application.

The panel chairperson will carry out the following specific responsibilities:

- Review the application critiques in PRIMO for applications to be reviewed in the panel meeting.
- Participate as a primary reviewer of some applications if requested by IES (e.g., in the case of discrepant preliminary scores).
- Work closely with the SRO to preside at the meeting and facilitate discussions and provide leadership in guiding the panel members in scientific deliberations and scoring.
- Play a key role in ensuring that each application receives a fair review based on merit by moving review discussions along, keeping the discussion focused on the scientific merits of the applications, seeking resolution of differences in fact or opinion, pointing out significant aspects

that have been ignored, or advising the panel if it appears that members are applying inappropriate criteria.

- Manage allotted time so that all applications receive appropriate consideration.

More information and guidance for panel chairs regarding their roles and responsibilities is provided in a separate Panel Chair Supplement to this Panel Member Guide.

Reviewers

Reviewers are voting panel members who possess appropriate scientific credentials, maintain a record of academic publications within the pertinent disciplines, and have specific educational, teaching, or research experience. In addition, the majority of reviewers have experience in scientific peer review and in managing competitive, federally funded research programs.

The primary requirement for serving as a reviewer is demonstrated competence and achievement as an independent investigator in an appropriate scientific or clinical discipline or research specialty. Assessment of such competence is based on the quality of research accomplished, publications in refereed scientific journals, and other significant scientific activities, achievements, academic rank, and honors. Other qualifying characteristics include mature judgment, balanced perspective, objectivity, the ability to work effectively in a group, commitment to work assignments, good communication skills, personal integrity to ensure the confidentiality of applications and discussions, and the avoidance of real or apparent COIs.

Typically, reviewers (other than ad hoc reviewers) are assigned as a primary reviewer to a maximum of **8 to 10 applications** (based on a number of factors, including the total number of applications to be reviewed by a given panel and the number of reviewers serving on the panel). Reviewers will have access to applications assigned to them for review. Reviewers will conduct an in depth review and prepare written critiques and provide preliminary scores for each assigned application using the Reviewer Critique template provided in PRIMO. All applications assigned to the panel will be accessible to the reviewers via PRIMO approximately 4-6 weeks prior to the date by which reviewers need to submit initial scores and critiques.

The reviewer will carry out the following specific responsibilities:

- Sign and return the Panel Member Agreement form to GDIT to confirm participation. Communicate to arrange travel and accommodations plans.
- Read the relevant Request(s) for Applications (RFAs) and Reviewer Materials provided by IES to each panel.
- Identify COIs as explained above under “Identifying COIs Using PRIMO” and provide more information as requested. Reviewers are asked to look over the applications as soon as they can access them in PRIMO to identify any additional COIs with assigned applications.
- View applications online and thoroughly review and provide a written evaluation for assigned applications using the Reviewer Critique template posted in PRIMO. The reviewer will
 - ⇒ Write a brief description of the overall application;
 - ⇒ Identify each application’s key strengths and weaknesses for each of the review criteria and prepare critical, evaluative comments; and

- ⇒ Write a cohesive, integrated summary of the overall assessment of the application, including the main strengths and weaknesses of the application.
- Save work online in PRIMO as often as needed until ready to submit the final premeeting scores and written critiques. Before final submission of premeeting reviews, changes may be made as needed. The SRO will monitor critiques to ensure that the comments adhere to the requirements presented in this handbook. Timely submission of premeeting critiques and scores is essential to identify the most competitive applications and to finalize the order of review before the panel meeting. Once finalized premeeting reviews are submitted, panel members who have finalized all of their reviews can access the reviews of other panel members.
 - Score and submit completed application **critiques** to GDIT via the PRIMO system by the **due date**, usually about **10 business days** before the review panel meeting date. Reviews must be completed by the due date so that triage of the applications can be accomplished with sufficient time for reviewers to familiarize themselves with all of the applications to be discussed at the review session.
 - Review (i.e., read but do not prepare written critiques for) all applications that will be discussed by the panel prior to the panel meeting so that he/she will be able to score each application after hearing the presentations by the primary reviewers and the full panel discussion. (Within about 2 days following the due date for preliminary scores, a list of the top applications will be available for reviewers so that reviewers know which applications will be discussed by the full panel. have time to examine these applications before the panel meeting.)
 - At the panel meeting, orally present evaluations of assigned applications to the panel in the order of review established by IES.
 - Participate actively in the assessment, discussion, and scoring of all applications reviewed by the panel, except those for which he or she has a COI. (Ad hoc reviewers, if any, will participate only in the assessment, discussion, and scoring of applications assigned to them.)
 - Prepare a written summary of the panel discussion if assigned as the synthesizer for an application.
 - Make changes in PRIMO at the review meeting to any evaluations, including scores and written critiques that may have changed because of the review panel's discussion or other technical information presented.
 - Refrain from any disclosure of the confidential written or spoken information that is part of the peer review process.
 - Return all confidential material to GDIT as requested.
 - Retain an electronic copy of each submitted review until all summary statements have been delivered so that any discrepancies can be corrected as summary statements are completed. Ten weeks after the panel meeting, the reviews should be deleted.

Reviewer forms, critiques, and other documents must be completed in a timely fashion and returned to GDIT when requested.

Review Technical Assistant

Peer review panels are supported by RTAs. The RTAs serve as skilled administrative assistants to the SROs and are available to assist panel members with clerical or administrative needs. The RTAs will carry out the following specific responsibilities:

- Provide premeeting and onsite meeting support, including ensuring that panel members are not present during the review of applications with which they are in conflict.
- Provide instruction in the use of reviewer scoring documents.
- Display preliminary and final scores on a whiteboard during the panel discussion of each application.
- Reproduce any materials needed by the review panel.
- Distribute and collect all meeting materials.
- Monitor the completeness of reviewer scoring documents.
- Manage all review documents generated at each panel meeting.