Scientific Management Review Board
Grant Review, Award, and Management Process

CHARGE TO THE SMRB

BACKGROUND

The majority of the National Institutes of Health's (NIH's) funding is distributed through grants to extramural researchers, so it is vital that NIH optimize grant-making in a way that streamlines the process while maintaining accountability and high performance standards. Reducing the time and effort needed to comply with grant-related administrative requirements will allow researchers to spend more time on research. Throughout its history, NIH has used evolving technologies and input from its many stakeholder communities to improve the grant-making process. The biomedical research enterprise today has a new set of challenges and opportunities. In the current fiscal climate, researchers face declining application success rates and therefore devote more time and effort to preparing and submitting applications. At the same time, advances in technology may help to improve overall efficiency and effectiveness in the grant-making process.

The range of backgrounds and perspectives represented on the NIH Scientific Management Review Board (SMRB) presents NIH with the opportunity to seek high-level advice regarding the grant-making process as a whole. The SMRB is tasked with assessing the ecosystem that includes receipt and referral of applications, initial and secondary review, the disbursement of funds, and grant management. The SMRB will provide recommendations to NIH to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of this system.

CHARGE

NIH requests that the SMRB recommend ways to further optimize the process of reviewing, awarding, and managing grants in a way that maximizes the time researchers can devote to research while still maintaining proper oversight. In addressing this charge, the SMRB should consider how NIH could:

- Streamline the grant-making process and shorten the time from application to allocation of funds, and

- Address the administrative requirements on applicants and their institutions, scientific reviewers, Council members, and NIH staff while maintaining a high-quality review and management process.

PROCESS

The Grant Review, Award, and Management Process Working Group will:

- Assess each aspect of the current NIH grant-making process and determine whether any change is warranted;

- Examine grant-making processes in other U.S. agencies, research funding bodies, and nations and any available reviews of these systems in order to assess the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches;

- Seek input from the general public, stakeholders in the biomedical research community, participants in the grant-making process, and individuals with expertise in the review, awarding, and management of biomedical research grants in the U.S. and abroad;

- Identify possible strategies for improving the NIH grant-making process and articulate the rationale for their selection;

- Hold deliberations in conjunction with the full SMRB; and

- Report recommendations to the full SMRB.

DELIVERABLES

The Grant Review, Award, and Management Process Working Group is asked to consider ways to improve the NIH grant-making process. The Working Group will present to the full SMRB:

- The fundamental principles that should underpin any recommended changes to the process;

- A comprehensive analysis of each step in the process; and

- Recommended strategies to use in streamlining and shortening the process while reducing administrative burden to all parties, as well as the rationale for selecting these recommendations.

The Grant Review, Award, and Management Process Working Group will present its findings and recommendations to the full SMRB in a timeframe that positions the full Board to complete its deliberations on this matter by spring 2015.