

CAPS Peer Review Sessions Guidelines for Presenters and Reviewers

Peer review sessions provide our Center an important opportunity for brainstorming; discussing scientific issues; and, reviewing and contributing to each other's manuscripts, grant proposals, and presentations to assure that they are of the highest quality before they go out the door. Peer review is also a way for our scientists to ensure that their work is relevant to and reflective of the needs of the community. The CAPS Community Advisory Board is notified of peer reviews, and members are normally invited to attend and offer feedback.

All work supported by CAPS grants, conducted by CAPS investigators, or for publication anywhere CAPS is cited should go through the peer review system. This includes all manuscripts and grant proposals, including supplements and competitive renewals.

Ideally, all NIH proposals should go through two reviews: a concept review and a final grant proposal review. The concept review provides a time to discuss the ideas, specific aims, and methods of a grant proposal. The proposal should not be entirely written at this time (except for aims). Concept reviews should be done at least 2½ months before the grant is due to UCSF Contracts and Grants. Early career scientists (including postdoctoral fellows, specialists, and assistant professors) are required to have their proposals go through a concept review.

All NIH grants from any CAPS scientists *must* go through a final proposal review, which should occur at least 3 weeks before submission to Contracts and Grants. Other grants (e.g., CDC, UARP) must go through at least one review as well, with the exception of internal UCSF grants (e.g., CAPS Innovative, CFAR, ARI, and CTSI grants).

For resubmission of proposals, a “pink sheet” review, in which the committee focuses on the NIH panel’s review of the proposal, can serve as the first of the two CAPS reviews.

Before the CAPS Director, Dr. Steve Morin, signs off on any grant proposal, the PI must go through with Steve a checklist that includes the requirement of having conducted a peer review. Grants that have not been peer-reviewed will not be allowed to proceed to Contracts and Grants.

CAPS is proud of its reputation for work of the highest quality. Our peer review system (you!) helps maintain that quality by ensuring that each manuscript, presentation, and project proposal is as strong as it can be.

Guidelines for Presenters (Reviewees)

Setting up the review.

- 1. Give ample advance notice.** Those wishing to hold a peer review session should notify Leslie Roos at leslie.roos@ucsf.edu at least 30 days in advance whenever possible. Shorter lead time severely impacts the chances of getting one’s first choice of reviewers, as most researchers’ calendars book up weeks in advance.

2. **Provide complete information.** Presenters should suggest several appropriate reviewers (including a statistician, if applicable), and may consult Susan Kegeles, Director of the Developmental Core, for advice when in doubt about whom to ask. It is helpful for presenters to invite potential reviewers personally, though this is not required. Presenters should also provide Leslie Roos with the full title (or working title), type of review (e.g., manuscript, grant proposal, concept), and suggested dates and times.
3. **Consider which CAPS cores should be represented.** If a proposal or manuscript concerns international research, invite someone from the International Core; if it involves collaboration, translation of research, or dissemination, request that a representative from the TIE Core attend. In addition to consulting with the Policy & Ethics Core regarding human subjects concerns, consider if someone from that core should be invited to the peer review. All proposals need to be reviewed by someone from the Methods Core. Most manuscript reviews, as well, benefit from the addition of a Methods Core reviewer.
4. **Provide reviewers with materials.** Presenters should provide materials for distribution to reviewers as early as possible, and at minimum 5 working days in advance of the scheduled review. This gives reviewers time to read, think about, and comment on the material. At the same time, a short note describing the kind of feedback desired should be provided to reviewers.

The peer review session.

1. **Be specific about what you need.** It is helpful if, on the front page of your submission, you include a note to reviewers saying what kind of help you would like from them. For example, "We would like to submit this as a brief article to the *American Journal of Public Health*. We realize it is too long now, and would like your help in finding ways we could shorten the manuscript while maintaining its scientific integrity. Also, if you have ideas about better places to send it, we would appreciate your suggestions." Or, you might want help shaping an idea, feedback on an early draft, or advice on responding to pink sheets.
2. **Give brief background.** When you present to the group, take 2-5 minutes to tell reviewers why you decided to do the project and what kind of feedback would be especially helpful to you.
3. **Take notes and accept feedback.** When receiving comments from reviewers, it is most helpful to listen and take notes. Keep your responses relatively brief unless the discussion is of general interest to the group, and avoid becoming defensive. You might bring a colleague to be your scribe so that you can focus on listening. You will get a lot of advice at peer review sessions, but you don't need to agree with or use all of it.

Guidelines for Reviewers

As a reviewer, you have the key role in supporting your colleagues in the peer review sessions. Please make an effort to accept invitations to review as often as you are able. Before you begin your review, it is a good idea to check with the presenter to discuss the feedback they are seeking. It would help if you prepare written notes or, at the minimum, legible scrawling in the margins to give to the presenter at the end of the session. By so doing, you can include as many detailed comments as you wish without distracting the group with small details during your oral review. You can also offer to e-mail your comments to the presenter prior to or after the review.

You should be prepared to present for 5 to 8 minutes. This allows you to present the bulk but not necessarily all of your feedback. You might focus on the following:

- (1) one or two major strengths of the work being reviewed;
- (2) one or two major issues of concern; and
- (3) one or two specific suggestions you have for addressing the concerns you raise.

As much as possible, address the issues for which the presenters asked your help. Try not to get "stuck" too long on any particular point or mired in small details; these are better communicated to the presenter in your written notes or personally after the session.

It is best to sit opposite (rather than next to) the presenter to facilitate the group's give-and-take. (In a smaller conference room, this may not be possible, particularly if the lead investigator brings community members to participate.)

What motivates peer reviewers to participate again and again is the wish to help others (and themselves) improve their scientific presentations. Reviewers learn a lot from thinking through the problems and solutions that come up in peer review. Peer review sessions work best when the presenters and reviewers provide an enjoyable educational experience for all present.

Role of the CAPS Community Advisory Board (CAB) in peer reviews

CAB reviewers bring particular strengths and assets to the peer review process. First, like many CAPS researchers, many CAB members are from communities that have been intensely affected by the epidemic. Second, many have expertise in carrying out interventions. Third, CAB members often have first-hand experience with understanding how their peers learn about research. Finally, CAB members bring an outsider's perspective that is often useful to researchers. CAB members are committed to helping assure that CAPS studies will be relevant to the field of prevention and to intervention practice.

Leslie Roos will forward the Website CAB link to everyone who requests a review reminding them that CAB members can participate. If they identify someone they think makes sense, Leslie will follow up. Leslie will include CAB-Co-Chair Carolyn Hunt on all of the peer review announcements so that if she sees one that would be a good match for a particular member, she can follow up.

Guidelines for Chairs

The chair's role in peer review is to set the tone of the meeting and ensure that it does what it's supposed to: improve the science at CAPS.

Introduction: The chair welcomes everyone and makes sure everyone knows each other, summarizes how the session will run, then asks the presenter if he or she has any specific comments or requests for the reviewers. (Latecomers should introduce themselves briefly to the group, stating their name, role within the field, and role in the review.)

Review: The chair will try to keep the review focused on major points and suggest that minor edits be communicated directly to the presenter afterwards, verbally or in writing. If reviewers offer contradictory suggestions, the chair will lead a discussion of disputed points and try to come to a resolution. The chair will seek clarification on any comment that is not understood (chances being that if the chair doesn't understand it, the presenter might not either).

It is up to the chair to keep an eye on the time. First reviewers tend to use up a disproportionate amount of time. The chair should see that time is rationed giving all reviewers equal time, with time saved at the end for summary and discussion.

Conclusion: The chair should make sure the presenter has a clear idea of what needs to be done, of next steps. The chair should summarize key points that need to be addressed, if they aren't already evident, and determine whether suggested changes are acceptable to the reviewee. If not, more discussion may be needed. The chair should thank the presenter and the reviewers for their efforts and remind everyone that the discussion is confidential.

Proposals: When a proposal is being reviewed close to its submission time, the chair is responsible for making a recommendation about the proposal's readiness to move forward. This recommendation should be shared openly with the presenter; the chair notifies Susan Kegeles after the review, with a copy to the presenter. The presenter may disagree with the recommendation and, if so, should communicate this to Susan.

The recommendation may be that the object of the review is ready to move forward with minor changes; it may be that with major changes it is likely to be ready for submission (but maybe not); or it may be deemed unlikely to be ready for submission by the deadline. These recommendations are often hard to make, but it is in everyone's best interest to send forward only those proposals (and manuscripts, etc.) that meet our high standards. Proposals that fall short are likely to be rejected, costing the investigator a good deal of time. Grant proposals that have not undergone peer review, and for which a recommendation has not been made to Susan, will not be sent to the Department of Medicine for approval by the Department chair.

Summary

Presenters: Contact Leslie Roos to schedule a peer review session 30 days in advance whenever possible.

Suggest several appropriate reviewers including representatives from the various cores, as applicable.

Provide materials for distribution to reviewers at least 5 working days in advance of the scheduled review, along with a note describing the kind of feedback needed.

At the session, take 2-5 minutes to explain what kind of help you'd like from the reviewers.

Reviewers: Agree to review whenever possible.

Prepare a set of written notes or write comments on the proposal or manuscript.

Take up to 8 minutes to review.

Chairs: Keep it collegial, focused, constructive, and neatly timed. Make a recommendation as to the readiness for submission of the proposal (or manuscript, etc.).

If you chair the final review of an NIH proposal, submit a recommendation to Susan Kegeles about moving the proposal forward to submission.

All participants: Discuss, enjoy, and learn from the process!