

Fellowship review..... behind the scenes at the NIH (or AHA, etc.)

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**Fellowships are training vehicles.
Science is really important,
but the “training potential” of your
experience is just as important**

Look now for upcoming opportunities!

What else gets scored, other than the science?

- *Applicant
- *Mentor/co-mentor
- *Training plan/potential for training relevant to articulated career path
- *Environment



Fellowship Applications...how to get started

- **Look for opportunities in your area of research**
- **Some local/regional (NJCCR, NJ Spinal Cord Institute, etc.)**
- **Some from professional societies (AAI, etc.)**
- ****NSF, NIH, etc.**
- **Other agencies, AHA, etc.**
- **GradFund**

So you've submitted your fellowship application. What happens next?

- Proposal gets assigned to a group based on subject matter
- Next assigned to a subgroup or subsection
- Scientific Review Officer* (PhD) is tasked with organization of a “study section” or grant review panel
- He/she will assign applications to reviewers based on their expertise



Reviewers must be:

- Knowledgeable/subject expert
- Impartial, unemotional
- Fair
- Objective
- Accurate
- Critical, logical
- Reliable
- Able to write a helpful, readable review
- Able to assess “novelty”



Study Section Logistics

- Reviewers will have ~ 10-12 applications* to read and write reviews
- Will have ~ 4-6 weeks to do so
- Will meet in person or via teleconference
- Each application has 3 reviewers: R1, R2, R3
- Applications are usually scored by all. Review panel does not determine fundability, only scoring



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**Only ~50% of applications will be “discussed.”
Those applications with non-competitive scores will
receive full written reviews, but will not be discussed
in order to allow more time for discussion of the
competitively scored applications.**

50%

Revised Sections for NIH Fellowship Applications*

Candidate Section 4 statements: professional and fellowship goals, fellowship qualifications, self-assessment, scientific perspective

Research Training Plan headings have been revised to emphasize the training aspect

Sponsor/Co-sponsor 5 statements: mentoring approach, prior experience, commitment to the training plan, research environment, evaluation of the candidate's potential

**clinical trials requires an extra statement

***For all applications submitted after
1/25/2025**

Simplified Review Framework

NIH has reorganized the five regulatory review criteria into three factors.

The Overall Impact Score (scored 1-9) reflects the overall scientific and technical merit of the application; **all three factors will be considered in arriving at the Overall Impact Score.**

Factor 1: Candidate's Preparedness and Potential (scored 1-9)

Factor 1 is based on the candidate's and sponsor's statements and referee letters, and candidate's potential. This focuses on the applicant's background, qualifications, and potential for success in the proposed research.

Factor 2: Research Training Plan/Feasibility and Rigor (scored 1-9)

Factor 2 is based on the feasibility and rigor of project, and is sponsor/environment/resources appropriate. This assesses the rigor, feasibility, and alignment of the research plan with the candidate's training needs.

Factor 3: Commitment to the Candidate Expertise and Resources (scored 1-9)

Factor 3 is based on the mentoring plan, organizational commitment, contribution to successful project completion and progression to a productive career in biomedical Research. This evaluates the sponsor's commitment to the applicant's training and the overall mentoring environment.

NIH Scoring System (also adopted by many other agencies)

MERIT Assessment	IMPACT on candidate's research training and career development	SCORE
Overall research training VALUE of the application	HIGH No weaknesses or negligible weakness that will not affect training	1
		2
		3
	MEDIUM A good application with some minor weaknesses	4
		5
		6
	LOW Applications with moderate weakness	7
		8
		9

Overall Impact

- Overall Impact score is NOT an average of Individual criterion scores.
- It is a separate assessment of the likelihood of the fellowship to promote candidate's potential for, and commitment to, an independent scientific research career, in consideration of the scored and additional review criteria.



Overall Impact Score Guidelines

Training Value and its Impact on applicant's training and development

FELLOWSHIPS & CAREER AWARDS

Overall Impact:

The likelihood that the proposed training (F) or career development (K) will enhance the candidate's potential for a productive, independent scientific research career in a health-related field.

Overall Impact	High			Medium			Low		
Score	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Evaluating Overall Impact Consider the 5 criteria (weighting based on reviewer's judgment):				
Fs	Ks			
• Applicant • Sponsor(s) • Research Training Plan • Training Potential • Institutional Environment & Commitment	• Candidate • Career Development Plan/Goals* • Research Plan • Mentor(s)** • Environment & Institutional Commitment			
and other score influences, e.g. human subjects, animal welfare, inclusion plans, and biohazards				
*K05 and K24: Plan to Provide Mentoring				
**K02: Consultants/Collaborators				

e.g. Proposes training or career development of high value/benefit for the candidate who has high potential for developing into a productive, independent scientist. May have some or no weaknesses in the criteria.

e.g. Proposes training or career development of high or moderate value/benefit for the candidate who has high or moderate potential for further development, but weaknesses in the criteria reduce the overall impact to medium.

e.g. Proposes training or career development of moderate value/benefit for the candidate who shows moderate potential. May have some weaknesses in the criteria.

e.g. Proposes training or career development of moderate or low value/benefit for the candidate who has moderate or low potential for further development. Weaknesses in the criteria reduce the overall impact to low.

e.g. Proposes training or career development of low value/benefit for the candidate who shows low potential. May have some weaknesses in the criteria.

5 is a good, medium-impact application. The entire scale (1-9) should always be considered.

Impact of NIH Changes: The revised criteria and application aim to reduce potential biases and ensure that a wider range of candidates and research training contexts are recognized as meritorious.

The changes are intended to better highlight the candidate's potential and the quality of their training plan, rather than relying heavily on the sponsor's reputation or institutional environment

Fellowship Review Focus Summary

- The review should focus on the training **VALUE** of the application and its **IMPACT** on applicant's scientific development
 - ✓ the applicant's **potential** for an independent, scientific research career
 - ✓ the applicant's **need** for the proposed training
 - ✓ the sponsor's **training experience, funding, and commitment**
 - ✓ the level of **integration of the Research and Training Plans** to provide productive research training
 - ✓ the quality of the **research environment** (Scientific programs, facilities)
 - ✓ **Overall Impact Score Decision**: the **potential of the application** to promote scientific development and **prepare the candidate** for research independence

Questions?

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