

Responsibilities of Reviewers in Protecting NIH Peer Review

The [core values of NIH peer review](#) are (1) expert assessment, (2) transparency, (3) impartiality, (4) fairness, (5) confidentiality, (6) security, (7) integrity, and (8) efficiency. These values drive NIH to seek the highest level of scientific and ethical standards, and form the foundation for the laws, regulations, and policies that govern the NIH peer review process.

While all the core values are important and are due proper recognition, the NIH has growing concerns about peer review confidentiality, security, and integrity. These concerns arise from various breaches of review integrity, including the sharing of confidential information by reviewers, [inappropriate influence](#) by foreign governments over federally funded research, and [other inappropriate behaviors](#). Therefore, we provide these important reminders for all NIH peer reviewers.

Responsibilities. As an NIH peer reviewer, you are responsible for:

- Reading and signing a [confidentiality and nondisclosure certification](#), before gaining access to applications or proposals.
- Abiding by the [Confidentiality and Nondisclosure Rules for Reviewers](#).
- Maintaining passwords to the Internet Assisted Review (IAR) system in strictest confidence and sharing them with NO ONE.
- Keeping review materials in secure locations at all times.
- Declaring your known conflicts of interest on the [pre- and post-meeting certifications](#).
- Reporting to NIH officials* IMMEDIATELY and IN STRICTEST CONFIDENCE:
 - Lost or stolen passwords or confidential material.
 - Any real or potential breaches of review integrity (e.g., undisclosed conflicts of interest, breaches of confidentiality, attempts to manipulate the review process)
 - Any real or potential breaches of security (e.g., reviewers sharing passwords or disclosing records outside the secured systems).
 - Any suspicion or allegation of research misconduct (falsification, fabrication, or plagiarism).

Potential Consequences. The NIH may take steps in response to a violation of the confidentiality and nondisclosure agreement or conflict of interest certifications, in order to preserve the integrity of the NIH review process. Depending on the specific circumstances, such steps may include but not be limited to:

- Notifying or requesting information from a reviewer's institution.
- Terminating a reviewer's service.
- Withdrawing or deferring an application for later review.
- Referring the case to the DHHS Office of Research Integrity (ORI) or other federal partners, as appropriate.
- Notifying the NIH Office of Management Assessment (OMA) with possible referral to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General (OIG).
- Pursuing a referral for government-wide suspension or debarment.

***Contact Information:** To report a breach of confidentiality, security, or integrity, or to request additional information, please contact any of the following NIH officials:

- The Scientific Review Officer managing the initial peer review meeting
- The NIH Review Policy Officer (ReviewPolicyOfficer@NIH.gov)
- The CSR Review Integrity Officer (csrrio@mail.nih.gov)