

Frequently Asked Questions for Reviewers on NIH Application Submission

Under the new NIH submission policy following an unsuccessful resubmission (A1) application, applicants may submit the same idea as a new (A0) application for the next appropriate due date. The NIH will not assess the similarity of the science in the new (A0) application to any previously reviewed submission when accepting an application for review.

References:

NIH and AHRQ Updated Policy for Application Submission
<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-14-074.html>

Clarifications to the NIH and AHRQ Policy for Application Submission
<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-14-082.html>

Frequently Asked Questions: Resubmissions of NIH Applications
http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/resubmission_q&a.htm

Questions:

1. I have discovered a reference to a previous review in an application. Based on the policy for new (Type 1) A0 submissions, what should I do?

Contact the SRO immediately. The application may need to be withdrawn from the review process.

2. In my critique of a Type 1 A0 application, may I refer to a previous critique or review of mine from a previous version of this application?

No. Each new (Type 1) A0 application must be considered as a new submission and reviewers must consider only the information included in the current application regardless of any prior submissions.

3. In my critique of a Type 1 A0 application, may I make any comments regarding a previous submission?

No. Regardless of the nature of the comments, negative or positive, no reference to a prior submission of a new (Type 1) A0 is permitted in the written critique or during discussion of the application. In addition, reviewers should not refer to previous reviews or discussions in their written critiques or during discussion at a review meeting.

4. May I reuse my critique from a previous review for a Type 1 A0 application?

No. This should not be done. Reviewers are instructed by the SRO to regard as confidential all review-related materials and to securely dispose of all such materials in a timely fashion following the review meeting (published papers by the applicants are exempt). Storing prior critiques for potential future use is not appropriate.

5. Although this is designated a new (Type 1) A0 application, I have reviewed this same application before, and the applicant has made few or no changes. Why should I spend writing a complete new critique when most of the comments will be the same and I could just slightly modify a previous critique?

This is considered a new application, and any potential changes made by the applicant may not be readily apparent. You should treat the application as fairly as you would an application you have never seen before and be willing to consider the possibility that the applicant made changes as s/he saw fit. If there are similar strengths and weaknesses that affect the overall impact score, it is appropriate to restate these points in the critique. However, it is inappropriate for reviewers to “copy and paste” previous critiques, which in any event you should no longer have available.

6. In reviewing a Type 1 A0 application that I have seen before, may I give a worse score than the application merits in order to discourage the applicant from submitting the same application again?

No. The review of any new (Type 1) A0 application must be carried out in an unbiased manner without regard to any prior submission(s) of the same or similar application. The score should fairly reflect the merit of the application at the time it is submitted; this score may be better or worse than a prior application—but scores should not be used to send a punitive message.

7. May I propose Not Recommended for Further Consideration (NRFC) for an application that has been seen too many times?

No. An application should be reviewed and rated on its merits, irrespective of the number of submissions of the same or similar application. NRFC is appropriate for applications that lack significant and substantial merit or present serious ethical problems in the protection of human subjects from research risks, use of vertebrate animals, biohazards and/or select agents. NRFC should not be used punitively or to express annoyance at seeing an application too many times. A proposal to NRFC requires a full discussion of the application by the review group, followed by a motion and a formal vote (with the number of members who vote for and against the motion—or abstain, recorded in the Summary Statement). Should reviewers wish to consider for NRFC an application that would otherwise fall in the ND range, the application must be “rescued” during the streamlining process and will be subsequently brought up for full discussion.

8. There is an “Additional Comments to Applicant” section on the critique template. How can this be used to address issues and concerns related to previous submissions of applications designated Type 1 A0?

The “Additional Comments to Applicant” box was developed for reviewers to provide additional information or advice to the applicant (see http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/guidelines_general/Additional_Comments.pdf). The box may be used to advise the applicant against submitting an application again unless there are significant changes in the application (you may specify where you think changes are most needed). Note, however, that these comments are not binding, do not represent a consensus of the review panel and should not be considered in scoring the application. For new (Type 1) A0 applications, the comments in this section, as with any part of your critique, must pertain to the current submission only and must not reference past submissions or reviews (if any).