

BEGINNING FARMER AND RANCHER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM SUMMARY OF REVIEW PANEL MEMBER DUTIES

1. Reviewing Proposals:

The review panel is comprised of: a) beginning farmer and rancher educators from community-based and non-profit organizations (CBO/NGOs); b) universities (1862, 1890, 1994, or other); c) government; and d) farmers and ranchers themselves.

Each proposal is reviewed by three Reviewers (Primary, Secondary and Tertiary), typically one each from three different sectors (i.e., farmer/rancher, CBO/NGO and university/government). In no case does a Reviewer review or participate in the discussion of a proposal from his/her own organization or from an applicant with whom the Reviewer has a relationship that would present a conflict of interest.

Each Reviewer is assigned a total of 14-18 proposals to read. S/he will compose a written review of 1-2 pages for each proposal, addressing strengths and weaknesses for each of the Evaluation Criteria in the Request for Applications. Reviews, with the Reviewers' names removed, will be sent to the applicant after the panel meeting. Carefully written reviews that are constructive and thoughtful can be extremely helpful to the applicant.

Additional Reviewer(s) may be asked to serve as Reader. A Reader will read the proposal but not compose a written review, and may participate in the discussion of the proposal. In addition, if a proposal involves subject matter requiring unusual technical expertise beyond the review panel, the program may request a written review from "ad hoc" reviewer(s), who provide a written review but do not attend the panel meeting.

2. Writing Reviews:

Reviewers can see their assignments, view or download proposals assigned to them, and enter their reviews in the NIFA Peer Review System, PRS. Instructions for using PRS are available at: <https://prs.nifa.usda.gov/> under the link "Helpful Hints," which you can view without logging in.

You should compose the written portion of your review with a word processing program, then copy and paste your written review into the appropriate section of PRS. Save a back-up file to bring to the meeting. You will be prompted to give a rating of the proposal (excellent, very good, good, fair or poor) but the rating should not be mentioned in the text of the review. Also do not enter any information that would identify you as a reviewer. Once you have submitted your reviews, you can view other reviews for your assigned proposals prior to the panel meeting.

Proposals with the lowest ratings from all three Reviewers may be put on a "triage" list, presented to the panel at the beginning of the meeting. With agreement from the panel, triaged proposals do not receive further discussion during the panel meeting, so there is more time for discussion of higher-rated proposals.

3. Resubmissions:

Resubmitted proposals are treated as separate, independent submissions from earlier proposals. In other words, the current year's proposal is judged on its own merits. However, resubmissions are expected to acknowledge and address comments of prior Reviewers. The Panel Summary for the prior-year submission may be provided to the Reviewers before the start of the panel meeting.

4. Participation in the Panel Meeting:

During the panel meeting, the Primary Reviewer leads off the discussion of the proposal and the Tertiary Reviewer keeps notes of the discussion for a later summary. Discussion of individual proposals usually proceeds as follows:

- 1) The Primary Reviewer summarizes the proposed project and then presents the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal.
- 2) The Secondary Reviewer summarizes his/her critique of the proposal and summarizes any *ad hoc* reviews, with main emphasis on new or different points than those made by the Primary Reviewer.
- 3) The Tertiary Reviewer summarizes his/her critique of the proposal, also with emphasis on new or different points than those already made.
- 4) Other panel members can (and should) ask questions of the Reviewers, and may comment on related issues, principles or approaches, but should be careful not to state opinions on proposals they have not read.
- 5) The three Reviewers of the proposal determine an initial consensus ranking of the proposal (outstanding, high priority, medium priority, low priority, or do not fund). Reviewers may change their rating of the proposal from their original rating submitted on the written review, if warranted. In situations where Reviewers cannot agree on a ranking, additional Reviewer(s) may be asked to serve as Readers before discussion continues later in the meeting.
- 6) The Tertiary Reviewer ("Scribe") prepares a written summary of the panel discussion to explain the final ranking and recommendations of the panel. This "panel summary" includes separate paragraphs of strengths, weaknesses and synthesis comments (using the template in PRS). It is a supplement to written reviews to help the applicant understand the basis for the panel's final actions and any discrepancies among written reviews. The panel summary is written as a consensus of the panel. It must be entered in PRS and edited/approved by the other Reviewers before you leave the panel meeting.
- 7) After all proposals have been reviewed, the review panel looks over the list of ranked proposals, and is given the opportunity to adjust the proposal rankings to ensure consistency across all proposals.

5. Confidentiality

The USDA receives proposals in confidence and is responsible for protecting the confidentiality of their contents. For this reason, you must refrain from copying, quoting, or otherwise using materials from the proposals, and destroy all copies of any proposals, reviews, or related materials after the end of the panel meeting. We make every effort to protect the confidentiality of your review. The identity of the panel manager and the other panel members, and all discussions during the panel meeting, must also be held in strict confidence.

6. Applying to be a Reviewer

To be considered as a Reviewer, send an e-mail message noting your organization name and type (i.e., farm/ranch, CBO/NGO, university, or government agency), your state, your contact info (phone and email), and your area(s) of expertise (one paragraph, including any experience serving military veteran and/or socially-disadvantaged BFRs) to bfrdp@nifa.usda.gov.

More information on NIFA review procedures is also available at:

<https://nifa.usda.gov/resource/nifa-peer-review-process-competitive-grant-applications>