

award when, in the Administrator's judgment, such conditions are necessary to assure or protect advancement of the approved project, the interests of the public, or the conservation of grant funds.

Subpart B—Scientific Peer Review of Research Grant Applications

§ 3400.10 Establishment and operation of peer review groups.

Subject to § 3400.5, the Administrator will adopt procedures for the conduct of peer reviews and the formulation of recommendations under § 3400.14.

§ 3400.11 Composition of peer review groups.

(a) Peer review group members will be selected based upon their training and experience in relevant scientific or technical fields, taking into account the following factors:

(1) The level of formal scientific or technical education by the individual;

(2) The extent to which the individual has engaged in relevant research, the capacities in which the individual has done so (e.g., principal investigator, assistant), and the quality of such research;

(3) Professional recognition as reflected by awards and other honors received from scientific and professional organizations outside of the Department;

(4) The need of the group to include within its membership experts from various areas of specialization within relevant scientific or technical fields;

(5) The need of the group to include within its membership experts from a variety of organizational types (e.g., universities, industry, private consultant(s)) and geographic locations; and

(6) The need of the group to maintain a balanced membership, e.g., minority and female representation and an equitable age distribution.

(b) [Reserved]

§ 3400.12 Conflicts of interest.

Members of peer review groups covered by this part are subject to relevant provisions contained in Title 18 of the United States Code relating to criminal activity, Department regulations governing employee responsibil-

ities and conduct (part O of this title), and Executive Order 11222, as amended.

§ 3400.13 Availability of information.

Information regarding the peer review process will be made available to the extent permitted under the Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. 552), the Privacy Act (5 U.S.C. 552a), and implementing Departmental regulations (part 1 of this title).

§ 3400.14 Proposal review.

(a) All research grant applications will be acknowledged. Prior to technical examination, a preliminary review will be made for responsiveness to the request for proposals (e.g., relationship of application to research program area). Proposals which do not fall within the guidelines as stated in the annual request for proposals will be eliminated from competition and will be returned to the applicant. Proposals whose budgets exceed the maximum allowable amount for a particular program area as announced in the request for proposals may be considered as lying outside the guidelines.

(b) All applications will be carefully reviewed by the Administrator, qualified officers or employees of the Department, the respective peer review group, and *ad hoc* reviewers, as required. Written comments will be solicited from *ad hoc* reviewers when required, and individual written comments and in-depth discussions will be provided by peer review group members prior to recommending applications for funding. Applications will be ranked and support levels recommended within the limitation of total available funding for each research program area as announced in the applicable request for proposals.

(c) No awarding official will make a research project grant based upon an application covered by this part unless the application has been reviewed by a peer review group and/or *ad hoc* reviewers in accordance with the provisions of this part and said reviewers have made recommendations concerning the scientific merit of such application.

(d) Except to the extent otherwise provided by law, such recommendations are advisory only and are not

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binding on program officers or on the awarding official.

§ 3400.15 Review criteria.

(a) Subject to the varying conditions and needs of States, Federal funded agricultural research supported under these provisions shall be designed to, among other things, accomplish one or more of the following purposes:

- (1) Continue to satisfy human food and fiber needs;
- (2) Enhance the long-term viability and competitiveness of the food production and agricultural system of the United States within the global economy;
- (3) Expand economic opportunities in rural America and enhance the quality of life for farmers, rural citizens, and society as a whole;
- (4) Improve the productivity of the American agricultural system and develop new agricultural crops and new uses for agricultural commodities;
- (5) Develop information and systems to enhance the environment and the natural resource base upon which a sustainable agricultural economy depends; or
- (6) Enhance human health.

In carrying out its review under §3400.14, the peer review group will use the following form upon which the evaluation criteria to be used are enumerated, unless pursuant to §3400.5(a), different evaluation criteria are specified in the annual solicitation of proposals for a particular program.

Peer Panel Scoring Form

Proposal Identification No. _____
 Institution and Project Title _____

I. Basic Requirement:

Proposal falls within guidelines? _____
 Yes _____ No. If no, explain why proposal does not meet guidelines under comment section of this form.

II. Selection Criteria:

	Score 1-10	Weight factor	Score X weight factor	Comments
1. Overall scientific and technical quality of proposal	10
2. Scientific and technical quality of the approach	10

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	Score 1-10	Weight factor	Score X weight factor	Comments
3. Relevance and importance of proposed research to solution of specific areas of inquiry	6
4. Feasibility of attaining objectives; adequacy of professional training and experience, facilities and equipment	5

Score _____
 Summary Comments _____

(b) Proposals satisfactorily meeting the guidelines will be evaluated and scored by the peer review panel for each criterion utilizing a scale of 1 through 10. A score of one (1) will be considered low and a score of ten (10) will be considered high for each selection criterion. A weighted factor is used for each criterion.

Subpart C—Peer and Merit Review Arranged by Grantees

SOURCE: 64 FR 34104, June 24, 1999, unless otherwise noted.

§ 3400.20 Grantee review prior to award.

(a) *Review requirement.* Prior to the award of a standard or continuation grant by CSREES, any proposed project shall have undergone a review arranged by the grantee as specified in this subpart. For research projects, such review must be a scientific peer review conducted in accordance with §3400.21. For education and extension projects, such review must be a merit review conducted in accordance with §3400.22.

(b) *Credible and independent.* Review arranged by the grantee must provide for a credible and independent assessment of the proposed project. A credible review is one that provides an appraisal of technical quality and relevance sufficient for an organizational representative to make an informed judgment as to whether the proposal is appropriate for submission for Federal support. To provide for an independent review, such review may include USDA employees, but should not be conducted solely by USDA employees.