

CAPS Peer Review Sessions – rev. March 2024

Guidelines for Presenters, Reviewers, and Chairs

Peer review sessions provide an important opportunity for ensuring the highest quality and impact of work coming from our investigators.

For early career faculty (including postdoctoral fellows, specialists, and assistant professors): all grant applications from fellows and assistant professors should go through the CAPS peer review system (or the UCSF PRE-Proposal Application REview ([PREPARE](#)) process, as the primary mechanism). We encourage the use of peer review for manuscripts and other products (e.g., reports, surveys, presentations, posters).

All NIH proposals by early-career faculty should go through two reviews: a concept review and a final grant proposal review. The concept review provides a time to discuss the ideas, specific aims, and methods of a grant proposal. The proposal should not be entirely written at this time (except for aims). Concept reviews should be done at least 2½ months before the internal UCSF deadlines. Early-career faculty are required to have their proposals go through a concept review and a full review of the near-final application.

Mid-career faculty and senior faculty: Peer review is strongly encouraged for grant proposals for mid-career and senior faculty. Think of it as a free round of review before it goes to NIH or other reviewers. Please consider submitting to PREPARE as the primary source for peer review.

Guidelines for Presenters

Setting up the review.

- 1. Give ample advance notice.** Those wishing to hold a peer review session should notify Stuart Gaffney (stuart.gaffney@ucsf.edu) at least 30 days in advance whenever possible. A shorter lead time severely impacts the chances of getting one's first choice of reviewers, as most researchers' calendars book up weeks in advance. Stuart will send you a link to the online peer review request form. You can also access the link [here](#).
- 2. Provide complete information.** On the request form, presenters should suggest several appropriate reviewers (including a statistician, if applicable), and may consult Parya Saberi, Director of the CAPS Developmental Core, for advice when in doubt about whom to ask. It is helpful for presenters to invite potential reviewers personally, though this is not required.
- 3. Provide reviewers with materials.** Presenters should provide materials for distribution to reviewers as early as possible, and at a minimum 5 working days in advance of the scheduled review. This gives reviewers time to read, think about, and comment on the material. At the same time, a short note describing the kind of feedback desired should be provided to reviewers.

The peer review session. A chair will be assigned to oversee the sessions.

- 1. Be specific about needs.** It is helpful if presenters include a note to reviewers when distributing materials noting the type of help they would like. For example, "Do the preliminary data look strong enough to support what we are proposing?" Or, the presenter might want help shaping an idea, feedback on an early draft, or advice on responding to summary statements from a recently reviewed grant application. It is also fine to say "Tell me what you think overall; where are the holes, vulnerabilities, etc."
- 2. Give a brief background.** When the presenter presents to the reviewers, they should take 2-5 minutes to tell the reviewers why they decided to do the project and what kind of feedback would be especially helpful to them.
- 3. Take notes and accept feedback.** When reviewers are giving feedback, it is most helpful for presenters to keep their responses relatively brief unless there is a simple factual correction needed. It is recommended that they avoid becoming defensive and remember that if a reviewer misunderstands something in their work, it is highly likely others will too. Presenters will get a lot of advice at peer review sessions, but they don't need to agree with or use all of it. They might consider using a recorder on their phone or via a videoconferencing tool during the review (ask permission of reviewers before recording). It is recommended to allow all reviewers to complete their comments and to ask questions or provide clarifications during the interactive discussion at the end.

Guidelines for Reviewers

Reviewers have a key role in supporting their colleagues in the peer review sessions. It is important to make an effort to accept invitations to review as often as possible and to prepare written notes in the margins to provide to the presenter at the end of the session. The reviewers can include as many detailed comments as they wish without distracting the group with small details during their oral review. Reviewers can also offer to e-mail their comments to the presenter prior to or after the review.

Reviewers should be prepared to present for 5 to 8 minutes. This allows time to present the bulk but not necessarily all feedback. Reviewers might focus on the following:

- (1) one or two major strengths of the work being reviewed;
- (2) one or two major issues of concern; and
- (3) one or two specific suggestions reviewers have for addressing the concerns raised.

As much as possible, reviewers should try to address the issues for which the presenters asked your help and not get "stuck" on any particular point or mired in small details; these are better communicated to the presenter in reviewers' written notes.

Role of the CAPS Community Advisory Board (CAB) in peer reviews

CAB reviewers bring particular strengths and assets to the peer review process. First, like many CAPS researchers, many CAB members are from communities that have been affected by the epidemic. Second, many have expertise in carrying out interventions. Third, CAB members often have first-hand experience with understanding how their peers learn about research. Finally, CAB members bring an outsider's perspective that is often useful to researchers. CAB members are committed to helping ensure that CAPS studies will be relevant to the field of prevention and to intervention practice.

Guidelines for Chairs

A chair will be identified prior to the review. The chair's is to set the tone of the meeting and ensure that it does what it is supposed to: improve the science at CAPS.

Introduction: The chair welcomes and makes sure everyone knows each other, summarizes how the session will run, and then asks the presenter if they have any specific comments or requests for the reviewers.

The Review: The chair will try to keep the review focused on major points and suggest that minor edits be communicated directly to the presenter afterward, preferably in writing. If reviewers offer contradictory suggestions, the chair will lead a discussion of disputed points and try to come to a resolution. Try to keep the session from being a back-and-forth in which the presenter responds to each comment. Save the discussion until the end, after each reviewer has gotten through their comments.

Timekeeping: It is up to the chair to keep an eye on the time. First reviewers tend to use up a longer amount of time. The chair should see that time is rationed giving all reviewers equal time, with time saved at the end for summary and discussion. Minimizing comments from the presenter on each reviewer's comments will go a long way to keeping on time.

Conclusion of Review: The chair should make sure the presenter has a clear idea of what needs to be done as the next steps. The chair should summarize key points that need to be addressed, if they aren't already evident, and determine whether suggested changes are acceptable to the reviewee. If not, more discussion may be needed. The chair should thank the presenter and the reviewers for their efforts and remind everyone that the discussion is confidential.

Proposals for DPS Faculty: When a proposal is being reviewed close to its submission time, the chair is responsible for making a recommendation about the proposal's readiness to move forward. This recommendation should be shared openly with the presenter and the chair notifies the Division Chief after the review, with a copy to the presenter. The presenter may disagree with the recommendation and, if so, should communicate this to the Division Chief.

All participants:

1. Keep your comments respectful and productive.
2. Keep the materials/ideas being reviewed confidential; do not distribute or share details with people outside of the review.
3. Try to say "yes" more than "no" when asked to review.
4. Discuss, enjoy, and learn from the process!