

CAPS Peer Review Sessions – 2017 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 peer review system. We highly encourage the use of peer review for manuscripts and other products (e.g., reports, surveys, presentations). 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 scientists 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.

Guidelines for Presenters (Reviewees)

Setting up the review.

- 1. Give ample advance notice.** Those wishing to hold a peer review session should notify Stuart Gaffney at stuart.gaffney@ucsf.edu at least 30 days in advance whenever possible. 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 Mallory Johnson, Director of the 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 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 who oversees the sessions.

- 1. Be specific about what you need.** It is helpful if you include a note to reviewers when distributing materials saying what kind of help you would like from them. For example, "Do the preliminary data look strong enough to support what we are proposing?" Or, you 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 brief background.** When you present to the group, take 2-5 minutes to tell reviewers why you decided to do the project and what kind of feedback would be especially helpful to you.
- 3. Take notes and accept feedback.** When reviewers are giving feedback, it is most helpful to keep your responses relatively brief unless there is a simple factual correction needed. Avoid becoming defensive; remember, if a peer reviewer misunderstands something in your work, it is highly likely others will too. You will get a lot of advice at peer review sessions, but you don't need to agree with or use all of it. You might bring a colleague to be your scribe so that you can focus on listening or consider using a recorder or recording app on your phone during the review (ask permission of reviewers before recording). If you let all reviewers get through their comments, there will be time for interactive discussion at the end.

Guidelines for Reviewers

As a reviewer, you have the key role in supporting your colleagues in the peer review sessions. Please make an effort to accept invitations to review as often as you are able. It would help if you prepare written notes or, at the minimum, legible scrawling in the margins to give to the presenter at the end of the session. By so doing, you can include as many detailed comments as you wish without distracting the group with small details during your oral review. You can also offer to e-mail your comments to the presenter prior to or after the review.

You should be prepared to present for 5 to 8 minutes. This allows you to present the bulk but not necessarily all of your feedback. You 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 you have for addressing the concerns you raise.

As much as possible, address the issues for which the presenters asked your help. Try not to get "stuck" too long on any particular point or mired in small details; these are better communicated to the presenter in your written notes or personally after the session.

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 intensely 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 assure 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's 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 s/he has any specific comments or requests for the reviewers.

Review: The chair will try to keep the review focused on major points and suggest that minor edits be communicated directly to the presenter afterwards 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 discussion until the end, after each reviewer has gotten through their comments.

Time-keeping: It is up to the chair to keep an eye on the time. First reviewers tend to use up a disproportionate 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 reviewers' comments will go a long way to keeping on time.

Conclusion: The chair should make sure the presenter has a clear idea of what needs to be done, of 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/investigators: 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; the chair notifies Marguerita Lightfoot after the review, with a copy to the presenter. The presenter may disagree with the recommendation and, if so, should communicate this to Marguerita.

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!