



Sample Reviewer Guidance

What is the review process?

The NIH Plain Language/Clear Communication Awards submission review was modeled after the peer review approach. The NIH Office of Communications and Public Liaison called upon specialized review panels to provide fair and reasonable review of product submissions. Review panels were designed to correspond with submission categories. Reviewers provided fair and reasonable review of any submissions in their category; ensured confidentiality; recorded notes and scores for products reviewed; observed work schedules, and achieved maximum participation as panelists. OCPL asked reviewers to establish a review plan and remove (“recuse”) themselves from review of any submissions in which they had a hand in development (e.g., writing, editing, clearance) or those which they may have been perceived to have a bias (e.g., through association with an author or IC). In such cases, reviewers were asked to withdraw from review, for example by leaving the room or teleconference during discussion of items in which had an interest and to not score them. In the case of multiple recusals and factors potentially jeopardizing fair and reasonable review, OCPL assisted with additional volunteer reviewers.

What are the categories?

See list of categories at the end of this document and as outlined on the sample submission form.

What is the timeline?

Timelines are flexible and can be adapted, depending on each awards cycle and the number of products submitted. A sample review phase might begin in February and conclude by mid-March, followed by an awards or recognition ceremony held in mid-May.

What is the role of a review panel leader?

Each panel will have a lead coordinator who aggregates scores and communicates with the awards program office. Panel leaders schedule an initial planning call or meeting to discuss submissions and to chart a work plan.

Can reviewers nominate a submission for an award?

Reviewers are responsible for scoring but not for selecting winners.

How do panels get copies of products? What if submissions are not online?

Review teams receive only those submissions assigned to them for review in their category. Most products are online. Review panel leaders can work with the coordinating office to facilitate receipt of IC submissions that are not available online. It may be useful to designate one or more coordinators—plain language points of contact—for questions about submissions.

What is the review criteria?

Reviewers mark rating sheets with a score of 1 (low) to 10 (high) for two criteria each that combine to earn the product a total score. For each product, team reviewers record on a rating sheet a sum of two component scores: Quality of PL/CC and Overall Execution. This is the submission's subtotal score and should not exceed 20 points. Do not use fractions, decimals, or other partial scoring to lower or elevate whole number scores. For example:

Quality of PL/CC (up to 10 points):

The product engages the reader and target audience(s);
Content is clear, to-the-point and written with simple, straightforward language;
Organization is strong and logical;
The authors use active voice and correct grammar;
The product holds the reader's interest throughout; and
Authors avoid bureaucratic jargon and legalese.

Overall Execution (up to 10 points):

The product and message are appropriate for the target audience, and
The submitted product is useable, relevant, and achieves intended goals and purpose.

Example 1: Quality of PL Writing: 7, Overall Execution: 8, Subtotal Score: **15**

Example 2: Quality of PL Writing: 5 Overall Execution: 5 Subtotal Score: **10**

Do reviewers have to meet?

Reviewers should not work in "silos." Discussion and/or meetings may be necessary when there is great variation in scoring or if requested by reviewers. Discussion may serve to move a product from non-award to award status or vice versa. Discussion should call reviewers' attention to product strengths or weaknesses. Review panels may reserve open

discussion for those submissions earning greater than 10 points from each individual reviewer. For products gaining fewer than 10 *total* points from each individual reviewer, panels can agree to bypass open discussion.

Can reviewers deduct points?

Yes, from the subtotal score. Please account for and/or explain the deduction or disqualification in the notes area provided on the rating form. Each reviewer may elect to deduct 1 point from an item's subtotal score for each typographical error. Reviewers should account for and/or explain each deduction in the notes area provided on the rating form. Deductions include:

- For **electronic media** (i.e., on-line content, DVDs, CD-ROMS, web-based modules), the submitting office should provide *valid* URLs and working electronic media. If a product isn't accessible or does not work, the panel should discuss and confer with the submitter or coordinator for the submitting office. If reasonable correction isn't made in a reasonable period of time, each panelist may deduct up to 5 points from the submission's subtotal score. In rare instances, the panel leader may consult with the program office about potential disqualification.
- If **design and layout** play a role in the product's development (i.e. website design), reviewers should take into account proper flow, layout, tables, typography (i.e. bullets, italics, white space) and other visuals that achieve the overall message(s).

How do reviewers establish a product's total score?

The individual reviewer's total score for the item is the subtotal score, minus any point deductions. Each reviewer will initial and date their individual completed rating sheets ; turn in their original (initialed and dated) rating sheets to the panel leader; and retain copies of rating sheets to use in group discussion(s) or to clarify concerns that may arise later. The panel leader will report scores and turn in final rating sheets to the program office.

What if we think a product isn't eligible?

The eligibility timeframe for product submission may vary, depending on the awards cycle. One approach is to use the fiscal year or calendar year. Products must have been produced and completed during the eligibility period and should reflect substantial changes if the product is a revised product/new edition. For some products, such as those on the Web, the program office may require submitting offices to provide an archived link or CD capturing the submission during the eligibility timeframe, especially if significant changes follow the end of the eligibility timeframe.

What if a product has been revised?

Reviewers should note any products that are revised products from prior year(s). The emphasis should be on significant improvement. This includes revamped, redesigned, and re-launched websites. Reviewers should evaluate both versions. Please work with the submitting office to receive and review the correct version.

What about Section 508 compliance?

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, 42 USC 794d, requires federal agency website content to be accessible for people with disabilities. This provision applies to web applications, web pages, and all attached files. Section 508 applies to intranet as well as internet websites and material. Review panels may elect to test and verify Section 508 compliance. Any products determined not to be 508 compliant should be reported to the program office and may be ruled ineligible. See www.section508.gov for details.

Attachment 1: Plain Language/ Clear Communication Awards Program Categories (one category for each product):

Administrative/General: *Includes internal guide/manual, mission/policy statement, budget justification, correspondence, congressional testimony, strategic plan, mandatory/annual report. Format includes: report, study, website, statement, brochure, factsheet, pamphlet/booklet, etc.*

Administrative/Scientific: *Includes IC-specific scientific focus, research, planning, findings and activities. Format includes: report, study, website, statement, brochure, factsheet, pamphlet/booklet, etc.*

Extramural Stakeholder: *Includes informational resources and materials for stakeholder audience. Format includes: website, brochure, factsheet, pamphlet/booklet, etc.*

Health Promotion: *Includes health/nutrition information, wellness, how to, etc. Format includes: website, brochure, factsheet, pamphlet/booklet, etc.*

Multimedia, Social, New Media, and Video: *Includes video, audio, blog, Facebook, Twitter, radio podcast, etc.*

News Writing/Press Release: *Includes news information released to the media, general public, and stakeholders. Format includes: press releases.*

News Writing/Single Topic Article: *Includes information for the media, general public, and stakeholders. Format includes: single topic articles.*

Single Item of Newsletter: *Includes single article or item from newsletter or e-newsletter. Format includes: newsletter items.*

Special Language Materials: *Includes non-English language materials. Format includes: website, brochure, factsheet, pamphlet/booklet, etc.*

Training and Education: *Includes training and education materials for stakeholder and public audiences. Format includes: website, tool-kit, tutorials, manual, guide, booklet, etc.*

Visualizations: *(Visual Representation). Includes photography, animation graphics, scientific illustrations, graphics*

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