

National Institute on Aging

Intramural Research Program

**Board of Scientific Counselors
Review Guide**



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Overview of BSC Review Process

Each Laboratory within the Intramural Research Program will be subjected to a rigorous external scientific review at least once every four years. The review will include an evaluation of both the Laboratory leadership and the research of individual scientists who are independent investigators or staff scientists who conduct program-initiated research.

The BSC Peer Review evaluates Intramural scientists primarily on the basis of accomplishments since their last peer review, although careful consideration is also given to future plans.

The review will evaluate the research programs for their goals and long-term objectives, accomplishments, innovation, relevance to the NIA mission, and overall quality and impact.

The BSC Peer Review will evaluate candidates for tenure, as well as scientists occupying tenure-track positions at the midpoint of their appointments (see guidelines on Tenure-Track Investigators and the BSC Process).

The BSC will evaluate the Laboratory as a unit and provide the Scientific Director with advice on:

- overall scientific direction of the research program of the Laboratory/
Branch under review and new directions that could be considered

- interactions and synergism of research within the Laboratory and the Institute

- relevance of research to mission of NIA

- administration of the program

- allocation of resources

- tenure actions under consideration

BSC evaluations of individual investigators will address:

- quality of the research project(s), past accomplishments, productivity, and future directions

- significance of research and relevance to NIA mission

- research innovation

- collaborations/interactions with other NIA scientists

- level of resources (i.e., space, budget, and personnel) supplied to the investigator

- mentoring and training of fellows

Evaluation Criteria

To address these issues in a systematic manner, the NIH has proposed the following evaluation criteria:

Significance

Have the investigator's studies addressed important problems? Are the aims of the project(s) being achieved? Is scientific knowledge being advanced, and are the projects affecting the concepts or methods that drive this field?

Approach

In general are the approaches well conceived? When problem areas arose, were reasonable alternative tactics used?

Innovation

Do the projects use novel concepts, approaches, or methods? Are the aims original and innovative? Does the project challenge existing paradigms or develop new methodologies or technologies?

Environment

Is the investigator taking advantage of the special features of the NIA/NIH Intramural scientific environment or employing useful collaborative arrangements?

Support

Is the support the investigator received appropriate?

Investigator Training

Is the investigator appropriately trained and well suited to carry out the projects being pursued? Is the work proposed appropriate to the experience level of the principal investigator and other researchers (if any)?

Productivity

Considering the investigator's other responsibilities (e.g., service or administrative), how would you rate his/her overall research productivity?

Mentoring

Is the investigator providing appropriate training and mentoring for more junior investigators?

Recommendations about resources should be as explicit as possible, with a clear indication of which resources (budget, space, personnel) should remain the same, be increased, or be decreased.

1. The Scientific Director determines the schedule of lab reviews that allows each lab to be reviewed at least every four years. The exact date of the review is set approximately 18 months in advance. Review dates are determined by the IRP Specialist based upon availability of the Chair of the BSC, board members, Scientific Director, and Director.
2. Four to six months in advance, the Intramural Specialist begins working with the Laboratory Chief to determine the review agenda (who will be reviewed) and requests suggested names for ad hoc reviewers. The ad hoc reviewers are asked by the Director NIA if they are available to participate in the review.
3. The BSC is provided the following information:
 - a. A Laboratory Review book that contains an overview of the Laboratory, research project summaries of the individuals under review, and their CVs. (Provided to the Board one month in advance.)
 - b. Confidential summaries of research resources.
 - c. Copies of last BSC review.
4. The BSC review consists of:
 - a. An evening session prior to the review with the BSC, ad hocs and the Scientific Director.
 - b. A formal presentation of an overview to the BSC by the Laboratory Chief.
 - c. A presentation by each independent investigator and appropriate staff scientist of his/her research.
 - d. A poster session where junior staff (fellows, IRTAs, students) can present their research. (optional)
 - e. A closed session with the BSC and the Scientific Director and the Director to give a preliminary summary of the BSC review and evaluation.
 - f. A written summary by the BSC, which is provided within two months after the review. The written summary gives an evaluation of the overall laboratory and of each investigator. (Each investigator receives a copy of the report dealing with the overall laboratory and their individual research.)
 - g. A written response by the Scientific Director to the recommendations in the BSC report. Any individual scientist may submit his/her own response to the Board's review directly to the Scientific Director. The Scientific Director may or may not include any submitted responses with the formal response to the Board.

Note: At no time prior to the review date or prior to the Board's completion of the written report, should the Investigators under review or anyone in their laboratory contact any member of the BSC or ad hoc reviewers. Questions about the review process should be addressed only to the Scientific Director.

Responsibilities of Laboratory/Branch Under Review

Four to six months prior to a given review, the Chief of the Laboratory provides the Office of the Scientific Director with a list of each scientist who will be making a presentation at the review, and a draft review agenda indicating the order and title of staff presentations. This information is used to select ad hoc reviewers.

One and a half months prior to the review, the review book is compiled and sent to the Scientific Director for review. Once reviewed by the Scientific Director it will be returned to the laboratory for copying. One month prior to the review the Intramural Specialist will mail out the review book to all BSC members and ad hoc reviewers.

Approximately 20 copies of all slides being used are given to the Intramural Specialist in agenda order the night before the review.

Guidelines for BSC Report

Review book consists of:

Cover

Roster of attending Board members and ad hoc reviewers (provided by IRP Specialist)

Meeting agenda (provided by IRP Specialist)

Summary of the organization of the lab being reviewed, including its various sections/units

List of personnel, including their position, type of appointment and grade. They want to know specifically which positions are paid out of personnel budget and which positions are not paid for by NIA, i.e, Special Volunteers and Guest Researchers.

Brief description of the laboratory/Branch, including its mission and focus, accomplishments since its last BSC review, and future directions

Space usage

Operating budgets and personnel budgets broken down by section

Outside contracts, if any

Cooperative Research and Development Agreements (CRADAs), if any

Copy of the most recent prior BSC report of the Laboratory

Include an abstract for each poster that is being presented

For each scientist being reviewed:

A current C.V. and bibliography (please use the format we have previously requested)

Copies of up to three important recent manuscripts or publications

Details of ongoing research, including general aims of the research projects, overall past accomplishments since the last review, and a discussion of future research plans

A summary of the amount of support staff and space that the scientist uses, in addition to information about budget, contracts and CRADAs

A listing of former fellows and their current positions

Appeals

The BSC is advisory to the Scientific Director and action taken following the BSC review can be appealed only to the Scientific Director. A written appeal through the Laboratory Chief may be sent to the Scientific Director. <http://www1.od.nih.gov/oir/sourcebook/sci-review/bsc-toc.htm>