Grant Reviewing:
A Look from the Inside

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There is no underestimating the importance of getting to the right NIH grant review study section (i.e., group of 20 - 40 scientists focused on a particular research field).

Applicants need to carefully examine the study section rosters to match their proposal with the section that has the closest expertise (see http://www.csr.nih.gov), and then request that specific section in the cover letter.

A great way to gain great insight into the review process (what goes on in your study section) is to become a reviewer of a grant competition.

One reason to serve as a reviewer is that it's one of your responsibilities as a scientist, but there are many other advantages, e.g., exposure to the newest research; hearing
discussions of science from different perspectives/fields; becoming aware of common elements of successful grants; career advancement; becoming a better mentor.

One caveat: becoming a permanent member of a NIH study section is time consuming.

Here are a few ways to get involved or gain insight into the NIH grant review system short of permanent study section membership:

1. **NIH Early Career Reviewer (ECR) Program**: If your ECR application is accepted, you will be assigned to a study section and will receive training on review procedures, including how to write and upload critiques. You will be assigned two to four grant applications to review.

   You will attend a study section meeting and participate in the discussion of, and voting for, all applications. You will participate in no more than one study section per year and no more than twice total. [View program website](#).

2. **Become an ad hoc member** of a study section: (a) Contact the Scientific Review Officer (SRO) of the study section where you fit and send him or her your CV, asking to be considered for service; (b) Contact your professional society or research dean and let them know you are interested in being a reviewer.

   Ask them to add your name to the CSR list of recommended reviewers. See: [How to Be a Member of a R01 Study Section](#) (Howard Hughes Medical Institute).

3. **Michigan Institute for Clinical & Health Research (MICHR) Mock Review Study Section**: The faculty member or post doc is assigned a proposal to review and meets with a mock study section led by an experienced U-M reviewer. [Sign up for MICHR educational events](#).

   And remember, the best reviewer of your proposal before you send it to NIH is an investigator who has previously been a member of your intended study section.