NIH Scoring: What Are the Top Two Cards in Hand for an Impact Win?

By Chris Black, M.L.S.,
Assistant Director of Research Development Support, Office of Research

This is a series of tips published in UMMS Research News about writing proposals.

The Impact score is the synthesis/integration of the five core review criteria that are scored individually and the additional review criteria, which are not scored individually.

To evaluate, the reviewer(s) make an assessment of the likelihood for the project to exert a sustained, powerful influence on the research field(s) involved, in consideration of the scored review criteria, and additional review criteria (as applicable for the project proposed).

**Likelihood** (i.e., probability) is primarily derived from the investigator(s), approach, and environment criteria.

**Sustained powerful influence** is primarily derived from the significance and innovation criteria. However, the overall Impact score is not the arithmetic mean of the scored review criteria.
While we all strive for a royal flush in the five criteria, getting two very high cards may be all you need for a great Impact score, depending on what those two cards are.

The NIH Office of Extramural Research analyzed the correlations between the overall impact scores of 32,608 applications (FY2010) across Institutes and the five Individual criterion scores.

The highest correlations were between 1) **Approach** and 2) **Significance**, and then 3) Innovation, 4) Investigator and 5) Environment, in that order.

So play your cards right, and hope for a little luck, and you could be in the big game.

**Related articles:**

- [Overall Impact versus Significance](#)
- [NIH-Wide Correlations Between Overall Impact Scores and Criterion Scores](#)