Sharpening Your Focus:  
*Tips on Grant Proposal Preparation*

Finding the Right Study Section

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This is a series of tips published in [UMMS Research News](#) about writing proposals.

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File under:
- Reviewing
- Study Section
- NIH Reviewer

Make sure your National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant application is reviewed by the most appropriate reviewers (who will appreciate both the significance and the science of your study) by carefully examining the member composition of the study sections.

Unless requested, the [Center for Scientific Review (CSR)](#) will assign your application to one of a handful of seemingly appropriate sections.

**Here are some steps to select a study section:**

- Go to CSR and chose the [Integrated Review Group (IRG)](#) that represents your field; this will be a cluster of study sections (e.g., the AIDS IRG has 11 study sections)
• Examine the rosters of the likely specific study sections:
  • If the area seems right but you don't recognize anyone, read some papers by the members
  • If they seem to be working in very different areas or are likely to have competing perspectives (e.g., quantitative vs. qualitative analysis), go elsewhere

• Another approach is to go to the NIH Reporter and, using the text field on the search page, identify awarded projects similar to yours. The "details" will indicate what study section reviewed the proposal(s)

• Conduct some research on the committee members -- visit their websites or read their publications so you can choose the study section that's right for you

• Optional: Once you have determined a study section, identify a few individuals who may likely be your assigned reviewers. Ask yourself: would this person be enthusiastic about my project?

  • If relevant, consider citing a publication of a likely assigned reviewer (a little flattery never hurts...)

Request the study section in a cover letter along with your application (the letter is stored in a separate location and not forwarded to reviewers).

After submission, check the study section assignments on ERA Commons.

You can request a change, if necessary, by contacting CSR.