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ASSIGNMENT

The Division of Receipt and Referral (DRR) in the Center for Scientific Review (CSR) assigns each application to a review group that has the expertise to evaluate the scientific and technical merit of the application and to one or more Institutes/Centers (ICs) for funding consideration.
While many NIH policies give authority to the DRR to determine assignments, staff of the DRR consult with Institutes/Centers, Scientific Review Officers (SROs) and Integrated Review Group (IRG) Chiefs and applicants to reach the most appropriate assignment.
Investigators sometimes ask how much of the application is read in making an assignment. The honest answer is as much of the application as needed to make the determination. Referral staff have access to the entire application, not just the title and Abstract/Description. In many cases, they concentrate on the Abstract/Description and Specific Aims in making an assignment, with attention also paid to the Significance and Research Methods sections.

Requests made by investigators and the assignment of previous applications are also considered. Some applications are quite easy to assign for both review and Institute/Center consideration, while others are more difficult. Referral staff regularly discuss the assignment of applications and how to handle unusual situations.

The **assignment** of a grant application involves a series of decisions:

· Determination of **activity code**. There are more than 100 activity codes to support research and research training ranging from individual fellowships through very large center grants. Nearly all Institutes and Centers (ICs) use the R01 and F32; a single or only a few ICs use other activity codes. The correct Funding Opportunity Announcement is critical for determination of the activity code. Activity Codes are identified in the NIH system by a letter and number code; examples include the following:

   o F32 Individual NRSA Postdoctoral Fellowship
   o K08 Mentored Clinical Scientist Research Career Development Award
   o P01 Program Project
   o R01 Research Grant
   o R43 Small Business Innovation Research Phase I (R44 for Phase II)

More information is available via the **NIH Grants Web page**.

· An **Institute or Center** (IC) is identified for primary assignment for funding consideration. This determination is based on the focus and mission of each of the twenty-four Institutes and Centers of NIH. Due to the increasingly multidisciplinary nature of scientific inquiry, the complex biological problems being addressed, and the use of many common research methodologies the ICs share many common interests. The interests of the Institutes and Centers are described on the main **NIH Web site**. Assignments are limited to the

Institutes/Centers that participate in the specific FOA used for application submission.

·   Applications may also receive **dual IC assignments**. Dual assignments acknowledge the shared interests of ICs in a given scientific topic and make all of the appropriate ICs aware of the application. The primary assignment is reflected in the assignment number (CA for the National Cancer Institute, AG for the National Institute on Aging, etc.). When multiple dual assignments are made, a rank order (secondary, tertiary, etc.) is not established. Both the primary and dual Institute/Center have access to the application, and summary statement and Council consideration is given by both the primary and dual ICs. However, a dual assignment does not necessarily increase the chance of an award. The frequency of a dual assignment leading to a change to primary and award is less than 2%.

·   Finally, the grant application is assigned for **review** to the CSR or to one of the other IC Review groups. CSR reviews most R01s, fellowships, and small business applications. IC review groups handle applications that have Institute-specific features such as program projects, training grants, career development awards, and responses to Requests for Applications.

For applications assigned to an Institute/Center review branch for peer review, a general assignment is made to that IC; the staff in the review unit subsequently decides whether the application is to be reviewed by an IC standing committees or by an IC Special Emphasis Panel.

For applications to be reviewed within CSR, a two-stage process is employed with initial assignment to the IRG (Integrated Review Group, a cluster of scientifically related Study Sections) level and subsequent assignment to a specific Study Section or Special Emphasis Panel. By assigning all applications to the IRG level rather than directly to an individual study section, the IRG Chief and the SROs within the IRG have the opportunity to gain a broad perspective of the areas of science covered by their IRG and to appreciate changes in emphasis and the emergence of new areas. A number of methods are used to determine assignments within the IRG, though all involve discussions among the SROs and the Chief. Finally, the IRGs also have the option of suggesting that the application is more appropriate for a different IRG; they may discuss this with other SROs or IRG Chiefs or return the application to the DRR for reassignment.

Note: The terms **Study Section** and **Review Committee** are normally used for continuing review groups in CSR and the ICs, respectively. These are groups with members who have been appointed for multi-year terms of service; at any given meeting there are also usually a number of temporary members present to provide the expertise needed to review the applications**. Special Emphasis Panels** are review groups formed on an ad hoc basis to review applications requiring special expertise or when a conflict of interest situation occurs.
The following Information about the assignment (review and Institute/Center) is accessed through the **eRA Commons**:

·   The **assignment number** which is in the format 1 R01 CA987654-01 and provides the following information:

    o The type

        1 new application
        2 renewal application
        3 revision application

    o The activity code (R01, F32, etc.)
    o The Institute/Center with primary assignment (in this example CA stands for the National Cancer Institute)
    o A unique identifier for the primary institute/center- "987654"
    o The year and any suffix (01 is year 1, A1 indicates the first resubmission, S is used for revision)

·   Any **dual assignments** are indicated by the additional two-letter code.

·   The **review assignment**, including the name of the study section/special emphasis panel and the name, address, and telephone number of the Scientific Review Officer (SRO). The SRO is now the primary point of contact for the investigator throughout the peer review process.

·   Information about the **primary Institute/Center** to which the application is assigned.

If the above information is not available in the Commons within two weeks of submission, you should promptly contact the Division of Receipt and Referral (301-435-0715; 301-480-1987, fax).

If there are **questions** about the correctness and appropriateness of the assignment, the investigator should contact the SRO for review questions or the DRR for assignment questions. If a change in assignment is requested, it is most efficient to fax the request to 301-480-1987. The DRR will notify the investigator if the change is not possible. When the review location, primary institute, or timetable for consideration (council round) is changed for an application, the information will be updated in the Commons.

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Once the application has been assigned, responsibility for the application transfers to the **peer review process**.