Designating Priority Scores

As stated in NCI publication (No.05-122), "Everything you wanted to know about the NCI Grants Process but were afraid to ask", pp. 50-51.
Available in pdf at http://www3.cancer.gov/admin/gab/2005GPB/GPB05-HighRes.pdf

At present, the review committee may make one of the following recommendations regarding scoring an application:

- **Scoring:** Applications that are judged to have significant and substantial merit are assigned a priority score. The NIH uses a scale of 1.0 (highest merit) to 5.0 (lowest merit) to score applications during the initial or first level of the scientific review process. Those applications that score in the upper half (1.0 to 3.0) with respect to scientific merit are recommended for the second level of peer review (Advisory Council/Board) by the SRG.
- **Not Scoring:** Applications that are considered to be in the lower half are designated as unscored and are not given a numerical score. These applications are not discussed in the review meeting. Not scoring an application requires unanimous consent.
- **Not Recommended for Further Consideration (NRFC):** Applications that lack significant and substantial merit or have serious ethical problems in the protection of human subjects from research risks or in the use of vertebrate animals are designated Not Recommended for Further Consideration (NRFC). Applications designated as NRFC do not proceed to the second level of peer review (Advisory Councils/Boards) because they cannot be funded.
- **Deferral (DF):** Applications may be deferred if additional information is needed to make a definitive recommendation.

All SRG members who participate in person or by teleconference, video conference, or virtual meeting (as members of an Internet-assisted meeting) in the evaluation of an application may vote and score the applications. (SRG members with a conflict of interest may not participate in the discussion of an application and may not vote on or score the application for which the conflict exists).

Priority Scores
To determine the priority score, each SRG member assigns a numerical rating that reflects the reviewer's assessment of the overall impact the project could have on the field. This assessment is based on consideration of the five review criteria (significance, approach, innovation, investigators, and environment), with the emphasis on each criterion varying from one application to another, depending on the nature of the application and its relative strengths. The numerical ratings range from 1.0 (best) to 5.0 (worst), with increments of 0.1. A score of 3.0 is the midpoint score; the range of scores from 1.0 to 3.0 represents the upper half of the applications, while applications with scores greater than 3.0 represent the lower half. After the review meeting, the SRA averages the individual reviewers' ratings for each scored application and multiplies by 100 to provide a three-digit number that is the priority score. Generally, 4 to 5 months will have elapsed since the Principal Investigator submitted the application (see Figure 10, p. 47).

Percentile Rank
In addition to a priority score, most applications reviewed by the CSR receive a percentile rank. The conversion of priority scores to percentile rankings (along a 100.0 percentile band) is based on scores assigned to applications reviewed during the current plus the past two review rounds. Applications reviewed by a standing study section are ranked against all applications reviewed by that same study section over the three consecutive rounds. Applications reviewed by NCI review groups receive priority scores only, and percentile ranks are not calculated for these applications. The overall intent of percentile ranking (or "percentiling") is to improve the comparability of scored applications across SRGs and to minimize the impact of round-to-round quality variation. The percentile/priority score is the primary indicator of relative scientific merit when applications are being considered for funding within an Institute.