

The Corporation for National and Community Service **COMPETITIVE GRANT REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS**



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formats to accommodate people with special needs.*



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
THE CORPORATION GRANT MAKING PROCESS	5
BASIS FOR THE GRANT APPLICATION REVIEW	6
What governs the grant application review process?.....	6
What are the goals of the review and selection process?	6
What is the CNCS grant competition calendar?	6
What are the roles of the main CNCS offices involved in the grant application review process?.....	6
How does CNCS develop <i>Notices</i> ?.....	7
How does CNCS distribute information about funding availability or opportunity?	7
THE APPLICATION PROCESS	7
How does CNCS make the application process accessible?	7
What documents guide the application preparation?	8
How are applications submitted?.....	8
When is the deadline for the submission of grant applications?.....	8
STEPS IN THE GRANT APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS	8
COMPLIANCE REVIEW	8
What is the compliance review?	8
How is compliance handled for applications received after the application deadline?	8
EXTERNAL REVIEW	9
What governs the use of external reviewers to assess applications?.....	9
How does CNCS establish fair and unbiased reviews?.....	9
How does CNCS select external reviewers?	11
How are external reviewers trained?.....	11
What are the key roles during the review?	11
What is the review process?	12
What are the review models?	12
What rating system is used by external peer reviewers?	13
STAFF REVIEW	13
What criteria are considered to determine which applications advance from peer to staff review?	14
How are staff reviewers assigned and trained?	14

Do conflict of interest standards apply to CNCS staff during a review?	14
What factors are considered during the staff review process?	15
What are the next steps after staff review?.....	15
What is applicant clarification?	15
SELECTION, NOTIFICATIONS, AND FEEDBACK.....	15
How are final funding decisions made?	15
What is the process of notifications of award decisions?	16
What is the process for feedback to applicants?	16
OVERALL TIMEFRAME	16
How long does the grant application review and awarding process take?	16
Open Government Policy in the Competitive Grant Process	18
How is CNCS’s commitment to open government reflected in the competitive grant process?.....	18

INTRODUCTION

This document summarizes the competitive grant application review and selection process of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). This document promotes transparency with stakeholders and helps prospective applicants to better understand CNCS's grant-making process.¹

CNCS is an independent federal agency that is a leading grant-maker in support of service and volunteering and plays a vital role in supporting the American culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility and is a leading grant-. CNCS fulfills its mission by giving financial assistance through its many programs that support national and local initiatives. CNCS provides opportunities for Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve their communities and address critical needs through [Senior Corps](#), [AmeriCorps](#), the [Social Innovation Fund](#), and other grant programs and initiatives. To learn more, visit www.NationalService.gov.

In line with objectives and strategies included in the CNCS 2011-2015 [Strategic Plan](#), CNCS applies the following underlying principles to all grant-making activities:

- **Quality:** CNCS is committed to funding the best programs that meet the agency's selection criteria and priorities. CNCS is committed to maintaining a comprehensive review and approval system to ensure that we select the best applicants.
- **Accessibility and Transparency:** CNCS is committed to making the application process clear and easily accessible, widely distributing *Notices*, and openly sharing grant-making information with all stakeholders.
- **Fairness and Equality:** CNCS is committed to being fair to all applicants and potential applicants by remaining unbiased while providing technical assistance, reviewing applications, and making funding decisions.

In addition, CNCS continues to improve and enhance its grant review process to ensure it is effective, streamlined, and promotes transparency.

¹ *The information in this document reflects a summary of the current CNCS review and selection process. Official statutes, CNCS policies and regulations, or specific instructions contained in official Notices of Funding Opportunity shall take precedence over any conflicting information contained in this document. Please note that this document is subject to change and non-binding to CNCS.*

THE CORPORATION GRANT MAKING PROCESS

The diagram below shows CNCS's multi-step grant-making process from the appropriation of funds and awarding grants, through monitoring activities, to close-out.

The Life Cycle of Competitive Grants



- **Congress Appropriates Funding:** Congress appropriates funding to CNCS each fiscal year as part of the Federal budget process.
- **CNCS Board Approves Program Annual Plan:** CNCS develops an annual plan and budget for each grant competition. CNCS's Board of Directors reviews and approves the plan.
- **Plan for Grant Competitions:** The planning process includes developing an agency-wide Grant Application Review Calendar, the Notice of Federal Funding Availability or Opportunity (*Notice*), Application Instructions, and grant application review protocols.
- **Solicit Applicants & External Peer Reviewers:** For each competitive grant program, CNCS publishes a *Notice* that describes eligibility criteria, funding priorities, program requirements and the applicant's responsibilities. CNCS also recruits external peer reviewers.
- **Receive Applications:** CNCS reviews each submitted application for compliance with the published eligibility requirements. The eligible applications are then sorted and assigned to review panels.
- **Review Applications:** CNCS conducts a multistage review process to assess applications, using external peer reviewers (in many cases) and CNCS staff.
- **CNCS Award Decision:** The Chief Executive Officer makes award decisions after the staff review is completed.
- **Notification of Awards:** Congress and applicants are notified of the award decision. The public is informed through a press release.
- **Award Grants:** CNCS obligates and awards Federal funds to each application approved for funding.

- **Monitor & Administer Grants:** The grantee implements the program and fulfills the reporting and other requirements. CNCS provides training and technical assistance for the grantee, and conducts audits and program reviews.
- **Closeout:** At the end of the grant life cycle, any remaining grant funds are de-obligated and CNCS disposes of any property or equipment.

BASIS FOR THE GRANT APPLICATION REVIEW

What governs the grant application review process?

The grant application review process is governed by statutory and regulatory requirements, established CNCS policies and procedures, and available appropriated funds.

What are the goals of the review and selection process?

CNCS's review and selection process is designed to ensure that the grant applications submitted to CNCS for funding are evaluated based on a fair, equitable, transparent, bias-free, and timely process. This assures that grant awards align with the selection criteria stated in the *Notice* and CNCS's strategic goals and objectives, and represent a well-balanced portfolio of programs.

What is the CNCS grant competition calendar?

CNCS creates a grant competition calendar at the beginning of each fiscal year that includes critical dates such as the publication of *Notices*, application deadlines, and announcements of grant awards. CNCS does its best to follow the calendar; however, dates may change due to unexpected circumstances.

CNCS considers many factors in developing the calendar, including the:

- Need of each program
- Priorities identified by the Chief Executive Officer in consultation with their senior management teams
- Anticipated number of applications
- Complexities of the program requirements and application review process
- Program funding cycle
- Application review model
- Resources needed and available to support the grant-making processes
- Specific directions and priorities in the annual appropriations bill

What are the roles of the main CNCS offices involved in the grant application review process?

Many CNCS's offices participate in the grant application review process. The offices with the highest level of involvement and their roles include:

- The program office – owns the grant competition and participates in each part of the review, recommendation, and decision-making process
- The Office of Grant Policy and Operations (OGPO) – oversees and facilitates the process; ensures that CNCS policies and procedures are followed (or that differences are appropriately justified); and provides business intelligence, administrative, and logistical support
- The Office of Grants Management (OGM) and the Field Financial Management Center (FFMC) – provide budget and financial reviews of grant applications and award grants

- The Office of General Counsel (OGC) – provides legal counsel
- The Office of Government Relations (OGR) – handles congressional notifications
- The Office of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) – provides strategic direction and makes final funding decisions.

How does CNCS develop *Notices*?

The program office develops the *Notice* for each grant competition, following the Policy Directive on Financial Assistance Program Announcement issued by the White House's Office of Management and Budget's Office of Federal Financial Management. The program office aligns the *Notice* for a competition with the CNCS Board-approved annual plan, CNCS Strategic Plan, and the final appropriations bill.

Each *Notice* goes through an internal review and approval process. Application instructions are developed by each program office and cleared by the Office of Management and Budget's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, to comply with the Paperwork Reduction Act.

How does CNCS distribute information about funding availability or opportunity?

The *Notices* are distributed via channels that include:

- CNCS website and electronic mailing lists
- Grants.gov
- Email to state offices and state commissions
- Press releases
- Regular mail to potential applicants upon request
- Internal distribution to involved CNCS offices
- Social media

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

How does CNCS make the application process accessible?

All applicants must have access to the same information. CNCS accomplishes this by making all information about grant competitions publicly available to applicants from the time the *Notice* is posted until the application submission deadline. Support to all applicants includes:

- Technical Assistance is made available to all potential applicants through publicly-announced technical assistance conference calls. Playback recordings of technical assistance conference calls are available until the application deadline.
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) are posted on the CNCS web site and updated as needed.
- Publicly announced email addresses and voice mailboxes are set up so that potential applicants can submit questions and get answers.
- A TTY number is posted in every *Notice* to accommodate people with special needs.
- eGrants is available to applicants for electronic application submission.
- Staff are available to answer applicant questions through the publicly-announced National Service Hotline.
- Annual review of the *Notices* and application instructions to be sure they are clear and as streamlined as possible.

What documents guide the application preparation?

The application preparation and the review process are guided by the *Notice*, the application instructions, statutes and regulations, and technical assistance documents. For each grant competition, these documents are available on the CNCS website.

How are applications submitted?

CNCS requires electronic submission of applications through eGrants, the CNCS web-based application system.

The *Notice* for each competition includes specific instructions on how to submit an application in the event of technical difficulties with eGrants. Application submissions may be accepted through other means (e.g., via email, Grants.gov, or other submission methods) only in special circumstances identified by CNCS.

When is the deadline for the submission of grant applications?

In order to be considered, grant applications must arrive at CNCS by 5:00 pm Eastern Standard Time on the application submission date published in the *Notice* for each grant competition.

STEPS IN THE GRANT APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

Compliance Review

What is the compliance review?

All applications submitted to CNCS are initially reviewed for compliance with eligibility guidelines, basic program requirements, completeness, submission time, and any other requirements published in the *Notice* and application instructions. OGPO manages the compliance review process, in collaboration with the program office, OGC, and OGM or the FFMC.

OGPO establishes a Compliance Review Committee for each grant competition. The Committee discusses applications that have potential compliance issues and decides if an application has met the established compliance requirements to advance to the review process. If the Committee decides that an application is non-compliant, the applicant is notified.

How is compliance handled for applications received after the application deadline?

CNCS's Policy on Grant Application Deadline and Late Application Submission identifies circumstances in which CNCS may consider applications that were submitted after the deadline, and outlines the applicant notification and request for re-examination of non-compliance decisions processes.

Each *Notice* includes specific instructions explaining how applicants should contact CNCS if an extenuating circumstance leads to a late submission. The Compliance Committee for each competition evaluates late applications on a case-by-case basis.

External Review

What governs the use of external reviewers to assess applications?

CNCS statute and regulations, in particular the Serve America Act of 2009 establish the use of expert reviewers in evaluating grant applications submitted to CNCs for funding².

CNCS uses external peer reviewers to help identify the highest-quality applications based upon the selection criteria established in the *Notice*. CNCS staff work directly with external peer reviewers by convening them to serve on panels to read and evaluate the quality of grant applications.

External peer review informs staff review, identifies applications viable for full external peer review or for staff review, and provides feedback to applicants. Reviewers do not make decisions whether applications should be funded, but instead give CNCS an assessment of the quality of applications as a whole, or particular aspects of the applications. External peer review results are considered in funding decisions.

How does CNCS establish fair and unbiased reviews?

CNCS is committed to fair and unbiased reviews. This commitment is met by: screening reviewers for conflict of interest, training reviewers and panel coordinators to recognize and avoid bias during the review of applications, grouping applications with common characteristics on review panels, using published selection criteria to evaluate applications, and conducting quality control reviews.

Conflict of Interest

A Conflict of Interest (COI) occurs when a conflict exists between a reviewer's private interest and their official reviewer responsibilities. CNCS checks reviewers for the potential for actual and perceived conflicts of interest:

- A direct conflict of interest – exists if the reviewer has been personally involved in the submission of an application to CNCS
- An indirect conflict of interest – might exist based on various forms of affiliation with an applicant institution.

Prior to reviewing grant applications, reviewers must inform CNCS immediately of any possible conflict of interest or appearances thereof. Each potential reviewer must participate in an orientation session that includes information on Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality before he/she is confirmed to participate in a review. Both topics are also addressed in the Reviewer's Handbook and additional training sessions before the review begins.

Reviewers must sign and return a Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Statement after receiving their panel assignment and set of applications. When a perceived or actual COI is identified, CNCS staff review the situation and make a decision. If there is, in fact, a perceived or actual conflict, the reviewer is recused from evaluating the application in question, removed from the panel and assigned to another panel, or removed from the review as a whole. The application may also be moved to another panel.

² The Serve America Act of 2009 amended Sec 193 A of the National and Community Service Act to give the Chief Executive Officer authority to use peer reviewers for any grant competition. Specifically, Section 193 A (c)(10) states that the CEO may "obtain the opinion of peer reviewers in evaluating applications to CNCS for assistance under this title."

Confidentiality of Information

Reviewers have access to information not generally available to the public and so have special professional and ethical responsibilities. Reviewers are given access to information about applicants, but may only use this information during the evaluation process. After reviewers complete their review, reviewers are required to protect the information in a manner consistent with the confidentiality obligations stated in their signed Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Statement.

After CNCS announces awards, it may disclose certain information that has been provided to reviewers or produced by reviewers. Reviewers must keep confidential any information that is not disclosed by CNCS. Further, reviewers may not use that information for any unauthorized purpose, including for their personal benefit or for the benefit of any other individual or organization.

Applicants may ask CNCS for reviewers' comments. However, when reviewer comments are given to the applicant or made public, the reviewers' names are deleted and protected to the extent provided by law. Reviewers may not discuss names of other reviewers with anyone. Following the review, CNCS may publish the names of all external reviewers; however, no names will be linked to a specific application.

Establishing Review Panels

Whenever possible, similar applications are grouped and assigned to the same review panel. This gives panels experience with, and a deeper understanding of, similar programs. The practice also reduces or eliminates confusion.

Characteristics considered for paneling applications include but are not limited to the CNCS Focus Areas, program models, program focus, issue areas, service categories, target service audience, and organization type – and, as needed, other criteria. Once applications have been paneled, CNCS assigns reviewers to panels of applications based on their expertise and skill set.

Selection Criteria

As part of our commitment to unbiased review, all proposals submitted to CNCS are evaluated according to selection criteria established by CNCS statutes and regulations and published in the *Notice*. External peer reviewers evaluate grant applications solely on how responses address the published selection criteria.

The selection criteria include program design, organizational capacity, and cost effectiveness and budget adequacy. For AmeriCorps, the weight of each selection criterion is defined by regulation. For the rest of the programs, the weight may vary with each competition so that programs may address specific goals. Details on the selection criteria and weights are always stated in the *Notice*, as are any additional considerations and funding priorities.

Quality Control

Quality control at CNCS promotes fairness and consistency in the review process by ensuring that every eligible application receives full and fair consideration. CNCS use several quality control strategies to (1) validate the results of external peer review and (2) assess panel activities that might have affected an application's review.

CNCS staff review the results for fairness and consistency after external reviewers complete their assessment. Some applications might be selected for quality control review based on, but not limited to, the following reasons:

- Discrepancies in the results from external peer review
- Anomalies in a review panel
- Low rating in external peer review on an application that addresses underrepresented or unrepresented *Notice* priorities
- To support diversity of priorities and program models
- Discrepancies between external peer review and staff knowledge of performance by an existing grantee

Quality control strategies include having a second panel review the application, having a CNCS staff member read the application, and sending the application directly to staff review.

How does CNCS select external reviewers?

CNCS carefully chooses reviewers for their expertise and ability to assess the quality of proposed projects. CNCS strives to recruit and select reviewers who have:

- Knowledge and expertise relevant to CNCS Focus Areas
- Specific expertise relevant to particular grant competitions
- Diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives

An individual who wishes to be considered as a peer reviewer must complete and submit to CNCS a peer reviewer application in eGrants. There is a link to eGrants at [NationalService.gov](https://www.national-service.gov). They can also go to: [eGrants Login Page](#).

How are external reviewers trained?

CNCS requires reviewers to complete several orientation and training sessions and become familiar with key background materials, including the *Notice* and the program regulations that govern the competition. OGPO and program office staff members train the external reviewers. At a minimum, the training covers:

- Expectations of reviewers and review responsibilities
- Goals of the review, orientation to program content, and review forms
- Confidentiality, conflict of interest, and bias
- Selection criteria and the rating and scoring system.

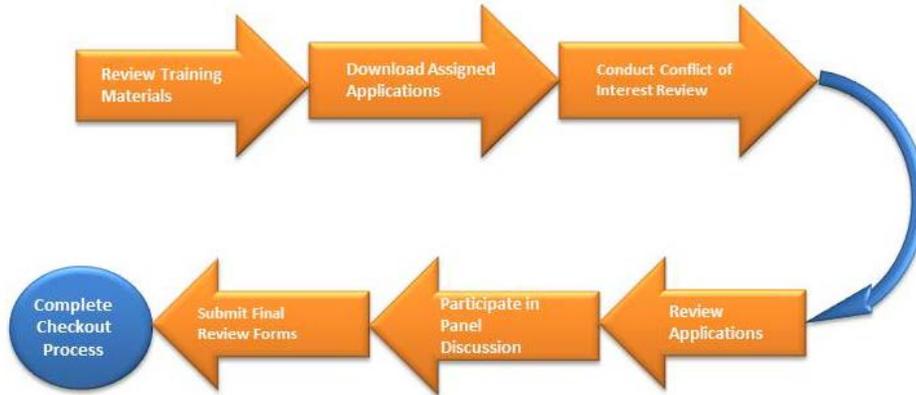
What are the key roles during the review?

Each review panel consists of reviewers, a panel coordinator, a program officer liaison, and a grant application review process (GARP) liaison. Their responsibilities are as follows:

- **Reviewer.** Reviewers evaluate applications. Their primary responsibilities include: assessing assigned applications, completing high quality review forms, and participating in panel discussions. Up to five reviewers are assigned to each panel.
- **Panel Coordinator.** Each panel has a panel coordinator. Their primary responsibilities are to guide, support, and monitor the work of the reviewers; manage panel logistics; provide feedback to reviewers on their forms; and facilitate the panel discussions.
- **Program Officer Liaison.** Each panel is assigned a program officer liaison from CNCS whose main responsibility is to provide programmatic expertise and guidance to the panel.
- **Grant Application Review Process (GARP) Liaison.** Each panel is assigned a GARP liaison who answers all process-related questions and provides all administrative and logistical support to the panel. After the panel coordinator, the GARP liaison is the point of contact for any immediate needs regarding review materials or any barriers to completing the review process.

What is the review process?

The process that our external reviewers follow to complete their evaluation of grant applications is depicted below.



CNCS conducts most of its peer reviews virtually, and only holds a small number of on-site reviews. During virtual reviews, reviewers use web-based and other tools to do the review. Depending on the model, the review may include one or more review stages. Each panelist reads, rates and scores, and prepares comments independently for all assigned applications. Panelists then participate in conference calls with their fellow panelists to discuss applications.

CNCS uses a non-consensus approach with all external peer review models. CNCS does not require reviewers to reach consensus or to come to the same conclusion about an application.

What are the review models?

CNCS uses several review models. When programs select a review model, they consider the volume of applications, the range of necessary expertise needed, available human and financial resources, and the complexity of the competition. In all models, reviewers must assess applications according to the selection criteria published in the *Notice*.

Models in which we use external peer reviewers include, but are not limited to, the following: Preliminary Review, External Review, Blended Review, and Issue Expert Review.

Preliminary Review

Preliminary reviews have panels of at least two reviewers who assess each application for program eligibility based on specific selection criteria published in the *Notice*. The purpose of this review is to identify and advance those applications with the best chance of being competitive for full review by identifying and winnowing ineligible or non-competitive applications.

External Peer Review

These have panels of three to five external peer reviewers to assess the quality of each assigned application. Reviewers individually assess each application, focusing on the quality of the applicant's response in each section of the application. Reviewers assign a rating and score to each category, and/or the entire application, as appropriate.

Once the individual reviews are complete, the panels convene by teleconference to discuss each application. The purposes of the discussions are to: ensure a common understanding of the application, discuss significant strengths and weakness of the applications, and discover

panelists' points of agreement and disagreement. The panel coordinator assigned to each panel guides the discussions. After panel discussions, reviewers submit their individual final results.

Blended Review

This is a variation of the external peer review model which includes CNCS staff on the panel. Panels of three to five reviewers drawn from a combination of expert external peer reviewers, CNCS staff, and other Federal agency staff assess applications submitted for funding.

Issue Expert Review

This model uses external peer reviewers who have expertise on specific subject areas. As in the other models, reviewers use the published selection criteria to assess applications, but they focus closely on a subset of the criteria or on specific subject area requirements outlined in the *Notice*.

What rating system is used by external peer reviewers?

The quality rating system is based on rating descriptions and a rubric provided to reviewers by CNCS. Reviewers must support their ratings on the review forms by citing significant strengths and/or weaknesses of each application. In addition to ratings for each criterion, reviewers select an overall rating that best captures the quality of the application as a whole, taking into account the different weights assigned to each of the categories of the selection criteria.

The rating system for most programs includes up to five categories: Excellent, Above Average, Average, Below Average, and Poor. The rating is adjusted to address program specific needs. Below are summary descriptions for these rating categories. Reviewers decide which rating description is the **best overall fit** in characterizing how an application addresses the criterion being assessed.

Excellent — High quality response, addressing all elements of the selection criteria and exceeding the requirements in almost all instances. Identified strengths were substantial and solid with no weaknesses identified, or an identified weakness has a minimal effect on the overall quality of the response.

Above Average — Quality response, addressing all elements of the criteria and exceeding requirements in some instances. Identified strengths are substantial, and identified weaknesses are minimal in quantity and effect on the overall quality of the response.

Average — Acceptable response, addressing all or most of the elements of the selection criteria. Strengths and weaknesses identified that may balance each other in significance. Overall quality of response is satisfactory, with room for improvement.

Below Average — Low-quality response, addressing some of the elements of the criteria and neglecting to meet the requirements in more than one instance. Identified weaknesses held a greater weight than the identified strengths. Overall quality of response is lacking with room for assumption in key elements.

Poor — Very weak response, neglecting to address many of the elements of the criteria and failing to meet the requirements in most instances. Identified weaknesses held a significant weight, overshadowing the identified strengths. Overall quality of response is inadequate, with significant flaws in key elements.

Staff Review

The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act ([Serve America Act](#)) places a clear emphasis on measuring the impact of service and focusing on a core set of issue areas. This landmark law is

the foundation of the agency's five-year [Strategic Plan](#), which lays out an ambitious, wide-ranging set of objectives that support our four strategic goals. These strategic goals – as well as consideration of measurability, achievability, usefulness, demonstrated effectiveness, previous investments, and the need to tell a compelling story of national service – guided the determination of agency-wide Priority Measures. Thus, when CNCS evaluates applications and awards grants, we consider how an application's proposed activities would contribute to our Priority Measures and advance the goals of the Strategic Plan.

What criteria are considered to determine which applications advance from peer to staff review?

As part of planning for staff review, each program develops a set of criteria that are used to determine which applications advance from peer to staff review. These criteria are based on priorities and considerations in the *Notice* for each competition, including but not limited to:

- Priorities identified in the agency's Strategic Plan (e.g. Focus Areas, Priority Measures, Pilot Measures)
- Additional priorities based on administration interests, congressional appropriation language, or a specific interest of the Board of Directors stated in the Annual Program Plan
- Balancing portfolio characteristics (e.g., Geographic and Focus Area representation)
- Statutory and regulatory considerations that CNCS is required by law to consider when we select a portfolio of programs for funding.

Results from external review (which focuses on the quality of applications relative to the Selection Criteria), as well as the priorities and considerations published in the *Notice*, are applied to select the portfolio of applications that advance to staff review. The level of funding available for a particular competition is also considered in making these decisions.

As much as possible and depending on data available, the program office considers the characteristics of a well-balanced portfolio, in order to ensure adequate representation in the pool of applicants that are selected to advance to staff review. Therefore, an application that scores lower in peer review may advance to staff review over a higher-scoring application in certain circumstances, including the following:

- The application meets a statutory priority or CNCS priority that is under-represented and would give balance to the overall portfolio.
- The application was misjudged by the review panel, based on evidence gathered following the External Review.

How are staff reviewers assigned and trained?

The program office, the OGM and the FFMC staff make the review assignments for their own staff. Staff from other departments who have the required knowledge and expertise are recruited and trained to participate in a specific review. The training is conducted by the program.

Do conflict of interest standards apply to CNCS staff during a review?

Yes. CNCS employees must comply with standards of ethical conduct and conflict of interest in grant reviews, per "Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch"³ in the Code of Federal Regulations. In addition to the standards of ethical conduct set forth in this

³ 5 C.F.R. Part 2635

regulation, there are conflict of interest statutes that prohibit certain conduct. Criminal conflict of interest statutes that apply generally to all employees⁴ must be taken into consideration in determining whether conduct is proper.

Each staff reviewer has a fundamental responsibility to tell the review coordinator about any actual or perceived potential for a COI associated with their service as a staff reviewer for a grant competition. Each employee acknowledges their lack of a conflict of interest by signing a conflict of interest agreement at the beginning of each review. If a conflict is identified, OGPO consults the Office of General Counsel. Depending on the circumstance, the employee could be removed from the review.

What factors are considered during the staff review process?

Staff reviewers assess each application against the selection criteria with emphasis on organizational capability, cost-effectiveness and budget adequacy. In addition, staff reviewers determine how well the applications relate to statutory and regulatory considerations, CNCS priorities, portfolio diversity, and other factors published in the *Notice*. Other considerations include: past grantee performance, progress to date on the program design and use of the funds, and results from the assessment of the applicants' fiscal capacity and administrative compliance.

What are the next steps after staff review?

Based on the results from staff review and portfolio analysis, the program office, led by the program director, develops a preliminary portfolio of programs and presents it to the Chief Executive Officer and other CNCS leadership for funding consideration. The program office takes into account external review results, adherence to the funding priorities outlined in the *Notice*, staff analysis, portfolio diversity, funding availability, and other factors as it builds the preliminary portfolio of recommended programs. The CEO carefully considers the program's preliminary recommendations, provides strategic direction as needed, and agrees on a preliminary funding recommendation portfolio, which includes applications for clarification.

What is applicant clarification?

Applicant clarification refers to CNCS request for explanations to applicants on programmatic or budgetary aspects of an application in order to make well-informed final funding decisions.

At the point of applicant clarification, CNCS has not made any final funding decisions. This request for clarification does not mean an application is approved for funding. Rather, it is an opportunity for an applicant to answer questions and clarify issues identified during the review. This process takes one to five weeks, depending on the number of applications being considered and the complexity of items for clarification.

SELECTION, NOTIFICATIONS, AND FEEDBACK

How are final funding decisions made?

Once the applicant clarification process is completed, the program director and other program staff analyze the results, and prepare and submit a draft funding recommendation package to the CEO and other CNCS leadership. The program convenes a decision meeting with the CEO and other CNCS leadership to discuss its recommendations and make final funding decisions. The CEO approves the funding recommendation package, after careful consideration of the

⁴ 18 U.S.C. 201, 203, 205, 208, and 209

recommendations, and if necessary, additional direction and revisions. The package is certified according to CNCS Funding Approval Procedures policy.

What is the process of notifications of award decisions?

The CEO notifies the Board of Directors once the funding decision is final. The Office of Government Relations notifies the Congressional Appropriation Committee, followed by notifications to Congressional representatives from the grantees' districts.

Next, program staff notify the applicants. Applicants that are approved for funding generally receive a phone call from their program officer, as well as a formal notification letter from the program director. The program office sends formal notifications of state commission competitive decisions to the commission for distribution to their sub-applicants. Applicants that are not approved for funding receive a notification letter. Concurrent with applicant notifications, the Office of External Affairs distributes a press release with the list of selected applicants.

Once notifications have occurred, the Office of Grants Management or the Field Financial Management Center processes the grant award in eGrants.

What is the process for feedback to applicants?

To the extent possible, CNCS give feedback from the grant review to applicants for the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to CNCS. Feedback to applicants must be consistent with CNCS's [Grant Competition Posting Policy and Procedures](#). Feedback includes the context for the competition, the review and selection process, and may be conducted via conference call with all applicants, individual calls to applicants, or in memo format. The program office considers factors such as the size of a competition, the review model, and the resources available in deciding what feedback should be given to applicants.

OVERALL TIMEFRAME

How long does the grant application review and awarding process take?

Depending on the complexity of each grant competition, the review model we use, and the number of applications, the grant application review and awarding process can take approximately five months from the application submission deadline to funding. The diagram below (CNCS Application Submission, Review and Awarding Timeline) illustrates the grant application review and selection process flow and timeframe.

CNCS Application Submission, Review and Awarding Timeline



OPEN GOVERNMENT POLICY IN THE COMPETITIVE GRANT PROCESS

How is CNCS's commitment to open government reflected in the competitive grant process?

CNCS's Grant Competition Posting Policy and Procedures establishes the grant application review documents that will be made available to the public. This policy applies to all grant competitions that result in new or re-competing grant awards, including cooperative agreements. It outlines the procedures, roles and responsibilities of CNCS offices in carrying out the policy, and the timing for publishing the material.

What information is made public and when?

WHAT	WHEN/WHERE
Annual forecast of grant competitions – List of anticipated review and selection dates for all CNCS competitions for each fiscal year. Continuing resolutions and availability of funds may affect actual dates	Via e-mail memo, listserv, and web posting; annually
Agency-wide description of review and selection process – Overview of the review and selection process	In the Notice of Federal Funding Opportunity or Availability (<i>Notice</i>)
Selection criteria, funding priorities and considerations, and selection factors used for portfolio balancing – The criteria against which internal and/or external reviewers will assess applications	In the <i>Notice</i>
Blank external review worksheets when applicable – Worksheets used to assess applications	Via web posting; as soon as practicable but no later than 90 business days after all grants are awarded
List of compliant applications submitted – Names of organizations submitting applications, including sub-applicants (if applicable) and program names	Via web posting; as soon as practicable but no later than 90 business days after all grants are awarded
Executive summaries of all compliant applications – Executive summary submitted by applicant as part of the application	Via web posting; as soon as practicable but no later than 90 business days after all grants are awarded
Names of external peer reviewers who completed the review process	Via web posting; as soon as practicable but no later than 90 business days after all grants are awarded
Copies of successful applications – Copies of the SF424 Facesheet and program narrative submitted by applicants	Via web posting; as soon as practicable but no later than 90 business days after all grants are awarded
Summary of external reviewer comments, for successful applicants	Via web posting; as

– when applicable

soon as practicable but
no later than 90
business days after all
grants are awarded

Notices are posted on the Corporation's website:

http://www.nationalservice.gov/for_organizations/funding/nofa.asp

Specific grant competition review material is published on the CNCS Open Government page

<http://nationalservice.gov/about/open/grants.asp> and linked to the appropriate program web page.