

# Ensuring an Equitable Review & Understanding the Review Process



*2014 justice AmeriCorps Blended Review Training*



# Orientation Objectives

- ◆ Equity in the Blended Review Process
- ◆ Conflicts of Interest
  - Examples of Direct & Indirect COIs
  - Identifying and reporting Conflicts of Interest
- ◆ Recognizing potential bias
- ◆ Maintaining confidentiality
- ◆ Understanding the workflow, resources, and expectations of the Blended Review process



# Equity in the Blended Review

- ◆ Ensuring that each application receives consideration through a fair and equitable process that preserves the transparency and integrity of the grant application review
- ◆ Understanding the Selection Criteria and Standards
  - Assessing the sections and applying ratings appropriately
  - Balancing the value of your expertise, professional opinion
  - Utilizing the Review Rubric
  - Using only the materials given to you; not considering outside information or factors (reputation, knowledge of organization, hyperlinks)
- ◆ Shared responsibility as a Review Participant
  - Conflicts of Interest, Bias, & Confidentiality
  - Page limits



# Conflict of Interest

- ◆ Conflict between private interests and official responsibilities
- ◆ CNCS considers both direct and indirect COIs
- ◆ Consider those around you in your daily lives—professional and personal affiliations





# Examples of Conflicts of Interest: Direct and Indirect

- ◆ You are assigned to review an application for an organization for which:
  - Your business colleague is serving on the Board of Directors
  - Your sister has been volunteering for 10 years
  - You provided consulting services in 2011
  - Your daughter has applied for employment
  - You are currently employed by an applicant/affiliate organization
  - Your friend's business could benefit financially
  - Your organization will be a sub-recipient of an applicant organization
  - You no longer work for the applicant org as of 2005, but were employed there for 15 years



# Importance of Reporting COIs

- ◆ Ensure a fair and equitable review for each application
- ◆ Preserving the integrity of the Blended Review process
- ◆ If you have any questions or think a conflict may exist, immediately contact your **Panel Coordinator** and **GARP Liaison**
- ◆ CNCS will determine the appropriate steps, if any, regarding your COI concern



# Understanding Potential Bias

- ◆ What is bias?
  - A preference or inclination that may inhibit impartial judgment
  - Can be both in favor of or against (an idea, a model, an applicant, etc.)
- ◆ Examples of potential bias can include:
  - Agreements/disagreements with methods or models in the program without basis
  - Favor or dislike of the author or applicant
  - Consideration of outside information (positive or negative) that is not included in the application
- ◆ How should instances of bias be handled?
  - Often will be flagged by another participant (based on keen observations)
  - Return to assessment and provide facts only to reconsider assessment
  - Exercise consideration and respect, remove emotions
  - Possible recusal from review of that application



# Confidential Information

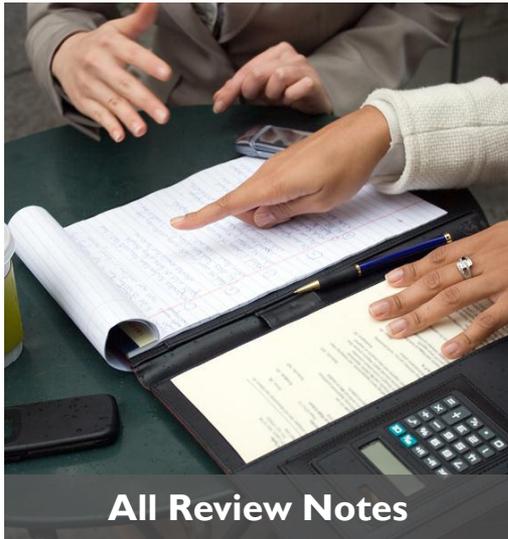
## Applicant Confidentiality

- Applicant names
- Applicant business information and financial data
- Details about the proposed program
- Review comments and review ratings

## Participant Confidentiality

- Identity of Review Participants during the review
- The link between Reviewers and their comments

# Proper Handling of Confidential Items



All Review Notes



Review Artifacts



All Applications

**Reviewer  
Names**



# Page Limits

## 15 Page Application Narrative Limit

### The narrative page limit includes:

- SF 424 Face Sheet
- Executive Summary
- Program Design
- Organizational Capability
- Cost-Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

### The narrative page limit **DOES NOT** include:

- Budget
- Performance Measures
- Evaluation Plan Narrative, or
- Required Supplementary Materials

# Understanding the Blended Review Process

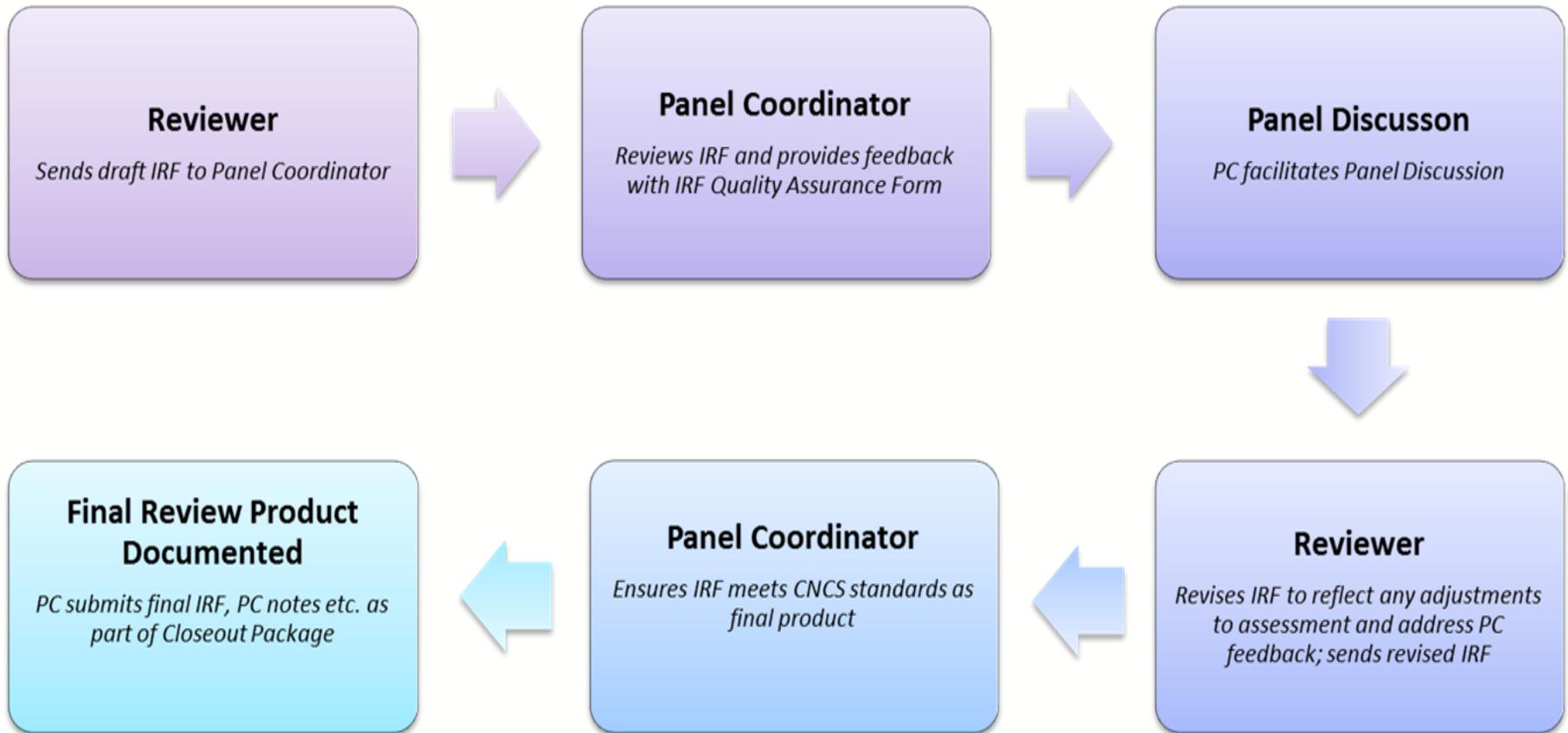


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# Process for Individual Review Forms

NOTE— This process begins **after** the Reviewer reads an application and drafts the initial IRF.





# Expectations of Review Participants

- ◆ Review all orientation and training materials
  - Notice of Federal Funding Opportunity (*Notice*)
  - Orientation Sessions
  - Review Rubric and Forms
- ◆ Report any actual or potential Conflicts of Interest and comply with confidentiality expectations
- ◆ Produce high-quality review products
- ◆ Satisfactorily complete all Review Participant responsibilities



# Roles and Responsibilities

## ◆ **Three Reviewers per Panel: CNCS Staff Reviewer, DOJ Staff Reviewer, External Reviewer**

- Conduct assessments of and provide ratings for each application
- Participate in Panel Discussions
- Complete high-quality IRFs
- Incorporate PC Feedback to improve IRF

## ◆ **Panel Coordinator**

- Manages panel logistics and facilitate the Panel Discussions
- Provides feedback to each Reviewer on every IRF; edit final IRFs
- Completes the IRF Editing Checklist for each application discussed
- Completes Panel Coordinator Notes for each application



# Roles and Responsibilities (cont.)

## ◆ **Grant Application Review Process (GARP) Liaison**

- Primary contact for process-related guidance and logistical support
- Checks with each Reviewer and PC on review progress to assist

## ◆ **Program Officer Liaison (POL)**

- The CNCS Staff Reviewer on each panel will serve as the first resource for this information.
- Additionally, a single POL will be available as a consultative resource for further clarification of justice AmeriCorps Criteria and Standards. Any requests should be forwarded through the Panel Coordinator.



# Key Review Forms

## ◆ Individual Reviewer Form (IRF)

- Captures the Reviewers' assessments and the significant strengths and weaknesses identified in an application
- Completed by all Reviewers for each application

## ◆ IRF Quality Assurance Feedback Form

- Documents PC review on quality of each IRF
- Completed by PC and provided to Reviewers as IRF feedback

## ◆ Panel Coordinator Notes Form

- Compiled by the Panel Coordinator
- Documents any issues with the review of an application

# Individual Review Form (IRF)

## 2014 justice AmeriCorps Individual Review Form

Complete the form according to the Application Review Guide and instructions for each cell. DO NOT copy and paste into the form.  
 Note: All white fields must be completed; shaded fields are not required or not editable.

### APPLICATION OVERVIEW

A. Reviewer Type	CNCS Reviewer
B. Reviewer Name	
C. Panel Number	
D. 2014 Application ID	
E. Legal Applicant	
F. Program Name	
G. Previous Grantee Status	
H. State	
I. Type of Grant	

### LOGIC MODEL COMPLETENESS (Assessed by choosing yes or no for each indicator. Do not assess quality of the information here.)

a. Logic model depicts number of locations or sites where members are providing services.	
b. Logic model depicts the number of members that will be delivering the intervention (identifying the specific number of lawyers and paralegals the applicant proposes to enroll).	
c. Logic model depicts the core activities that define the intervention or program model that members will be implementing or delivering, such as representation in Immigration Proceedings; screening for abuse, trafficking, and trauma; and referral to appropriate authorities and/or support services to	
d. Logic model depicts duration of the intervention.	
e. Logic model depicts dosage of the intervention.	

### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Executive Summary

### 2. RATIONALE & APPROACH/PROGRAM DESIGN

#### 2a. Problem/Need

<b>2a.i Standard:</b> The applicant indicates the court location(s) they propose to serve and describes the relevant community needs that AmeriCorps members will be addressing.	
<b>2a.ii Standard:</b> The applicant cites specific, relevant data to document the need, such as inadequacy of pro bono or low cost legal services -- as well as additional support services for Unaccompanied children - available in the area.	

#### 2b. AmeriCorps Members as Highly Effective Means to Solve Community Problems, Evidence and Measurable Community Impact

##### Theory of Change & Logic Model

<b>2b.i Standard:</b> The intervention is an effective way to address the problem/need identified by the applicant.	
<b>2b.ii Standard:</b> The theory of change is described consistently in the logic model and application narrative.	
<b>2b.iii Standard:</b> The inputs, activities and outputs are logically aligned.	
<b>2b.iv Standard:</b> The outcomes identified in the logic model are logically aligned with the problem/need and intervention.	
<b>2b.v Standard:</b> The theory of change and logic model cover comprehensively the applicant's entire program (i.e. no significant aspects of the program design are left out.)	
<b>2b.vi Standard:</b> The performance measures are aligned with the theory of change/logic model.	
<b>2b.vii Standard:</b> The performance measures represent significant program activities. (If not, do not review the PM; instruct the applicant to delete it during clarification.)	

##### Evidence Quality (Reference External and R&E Assessments)

Note: For preliminary, moderate or strong evidence level, if any of the four below quality indicators is rated unsatisfactory, the evidence level (found on Evidence tab) will drop down to the next lowest level. Quality indicators are not applicable to the pre-preliminary and no evidence levels and will not be assessed for those levels; choose "Not Applicable."

SPELL  
CHECK

SUBMIT  
FORM

OPEN  
SUBMITTED  
FORMS  
FOLDER



Corporation for  
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COMMUNITY  
SERVICE



# Individual Reviewer Form (cont.)

- ◆ **Please be sure to read the “Instructions & Tips” tab before entering any information! All macros must be enabled.**
- ◆ Work from a template saved on your computer
- ◆ Complete one IRF per application
- ◆ Excel form with cells that either have option for narrative or drop-down selections
- ◆ Use the descriptions of standards and considerations for the Selection Criteria in Handbook to complete the IRF
- ◆ Follow instructions in the Handbook *Appendix C*
  - Send to PC for review, CNCS Staff will need to submit to PC rather than Shared Drive



# Review Rubric

- ◆ Three types of ratings:
  - Five-rating option
  - Three-rating option
  - Two-rating option
    - Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory
    - Yes/No
  
- ◆ Descriptions of the Rubric can be found:
  - On the Reviewer Resource Webpage
  - Within the Reviewer Handbook
  - On a tab in the IRF



# Tips for High-Quality Forms

- ◆ Address justice AmeriCorps Selection Criteria Only
- ◆ Application information is limited to the reviewed application (no comparisons, etc.)
- ◆ Language is evaluative and does not restate information from Application
- ◆ Comments are aligned with the rating, and address the strengths and weaknesses with the greatest impact
- ◆ Appropriate comments
- ◆ No inflammatory statements
- ◆ Avoid referencing Page Numbers
- ◆ Grammar and spelling are correct



# Reviewing the Applications

- ◆ Read the full application (within the page limits)
  - Applications should be evaluated against the Selection Criteria, not other applications or outside information
  - Apply your experience and expertise with balance
- ◆ Complete your assessment of the Selection Criteria
  - Select the appropriate Rating
  - Provide relevant comments
  - Utilize your resources



# Panel Discussions

- ◆ There is a Panel Discussion for each application
  - Led by the Panel Coordinator
  - Estimate 45 minutes per application
  - Assessments can be shared with other Reviewers in advance, but only after all IRFs are drafted
- ◆ Purpose of the Panel Discussion
  - Open forum to discuss and re-consider your assessment of an application
  - Ensure fairness in the review
  - Ensure Selection Criteria are the basis for assessment
  - Discuss points of agreement and disagreement
- ◆ Serving as an Effective Panel Member
  - Be prepared, on time
  - Responsive to Feedback



# Expectations for Close-Out

- ◆ Documents to be completed:
  - **Individual Reviewer Form**
  - **Review Product Checklist**
  - **Panel Coordinator Notes**
  
- ◆ Documents are labeled, verified, ensure PC feedback has been addressed
  
- ◆ Confirm requirements are met with GARP Liaison



# Verify Completion of Orientation III

- ◆ *Send an email to us at [PeerReviewers@cns.gov](mailto:PeerReviewers@cns.gov) and include:*
  - *title of the Orientation Session (or number III);*
  - *and either one thing that you learned from the session, or one item that you have a question about.*
  
- ◆ **Live Call for Orientation Q&A**
  - Thursday, July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2:00p.m. Eastern
  - Call-In Number: (888) 455-7455
  - Passcode: Orientation

*Recording will be available on the **Reviewer Resource Webpage** for participants who are unable to attend the live session.*