



# BLENDED REVIEW HANDBOOK

## 2014 JUSTICE AMERICORPS LEGAL SERVICES FOR UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN



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# Table of Contents

<b>1.0 Introduction and Background.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Welcome to the 2014 justice AmeriCorps Blended Review Handbook .....	1
<b>2.0 CNCS Grant Application Review Process.....</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1 The CNCS Grant Making process .....	2
2.2 The Grant Application Review Process .....	3
2.2.1 The Blended Review Process .....	3
2.2.2 Roles and Responsibilities.....	4
<b>3.0 Ensuring Equitable Reviews.....</b>	<b>6</b>
3.1 Bias .....	6
3.2 Conflict of Interest .....	6
3.3 Confidentiality .....	7
3.4 Verify Page Limits for Equity for all Applicants.....	7
<b>4.0 Reviewing the 2014 justice AmeriCorps Applications .....</b>	<b>8</b>
4.1 Reviewer Timeline.....	8
4.2 The 2014 justice AmeriCorps Selection Criteria .....	8
4.2.1 Blended Review Selection Criteria .....	9
4.2.2 Consideration of the Performance Measures during External Review .....	9
4.2.3 Consideration Past Performance during External Review.....	9
4.3 Conducting the Individual Review .....	10
4.3.1 Reading the Applications.....	10
4.3.2 Completing the Individual Reviewer Form (IRF) .....	10
4.4 Participating in Panel Discussions .....	12
4.4.1 Tips for Productive Panel Discussions .....	12
4.5 Finalizing IRFs.....	13
4.6 Completing the Close-Out Process .....	13
<b>5.0 Supplement for Panel Coordinators .....</b>	<b>14</b>
5.1 Overview of the Panel Coordinator Role.....	14
5.2 Preparing for the 2014 justice AmeriCorps Grant Application Review .....	14
5.2.1 Panel Coordinator Timeline .....	14
5.2.2 Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality.....	14
5.2.3 Panel Introduction Call.....	15
5.3 Setting up The Panel for Success.....	15
5.4 Coordinating the Panel.....	18
5.4.1 Interacting with the Program Officer Liaison.....	18
5.4.2 Facilitating the Panel Discussion.....	18
5.4.3 Expectations for the Panel Discussion.....	19
5.4.4 Providing Feedback on Individual Reviewer Form.....	20

**Available as a Separate Attachment:**

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms & Legal Terminology

Appendix B: Links to Additional Reference Materials

Appendix C: Completing the Individual Reviewer Form (IRF)

## Materials Available on Reviewer Resource Webpage

- ◆ Notice of Federal Funding Opportunity (The *Notice*)

## Tips and Tools

- ◆ Timeline & Milestones for the Review
- ◆ Tips for Meaningful Comments (Sentence Starters)

## Administrative Forms

- ◆ External Reviewer Participant Agreement
- ◆ Panel Coordinator Participant Agreement
- ◆ Federal Staff Reviewer Participant Role
- ◆ Conflict of Interest & Confidentiality Statement (COI Form)

## Review Forms

- ◆ Individual Reviewer Form (IRF)
- ◆ Review Rubric

## Review Forms for Panel Coordinators

- ◆ IRF Quality Assurance Checklist (for PCs only)
- ◆ Panel Coordinator Notes (for PCs only)

CNCS has developed pre-recorded and online Orientation Sessions that complement particular sections in this Handbook to ensure that Reviewers are fully prepared for the review experience.

These Sessions include:

- ◆ *AmeriCorps 101*
- ◆ *Assessing Selection Criteria: Need, Theory of Change, Evidence, and Organizational Capability*
- ◆ *Ensuring Equitable Reviews and Reviewing Applications*
- ◆ *Panel Coordinator Orientation (for Panel Coordinators only)*

The Orientation Sessions are required; recordings of each session are available to Review Participants to access at a time convenient for your schedule.

All training and reference materials are made available on the **CNCS Reviewer Resource Webpage** (<http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/funding-opportunities/justice-ameri-corps-review>), where Review Participants access the Review Materials in the appropriate electronic format (Word, Excel, or PDF) as appropriate. The two primary types of forms are Administrative and Review.

**Administrative Forms** include Conflict of Interest (COI) and Participation Agreements. These forms are available as PDFs to download, complete (sign), and submit via fax or email.

The **Review Forms** include the Individual Reviewer Form (IRF). This form is provided in an Excel format for Reviewers to download, save, and complete to document their review of each application. Please read the Instructions Tab FIRST before completing any portion of the form. (For each IRF, the Reviewer will need to enable macros and save the form—this will allow your review results to be captured and uploaded properly in our system at the conclusion review. This is not a step that can be completed after the form has been started.)

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**NOTE:** For any questions or suggestions about this Handbook or any of the training materials, please email [PeerReviewers@cns.gov](mailto:PeerReviewers@cns.gov). Emails to this address are received by review support staff and every effort is made to respond within one business day.

# 1.0 Introduction and Background

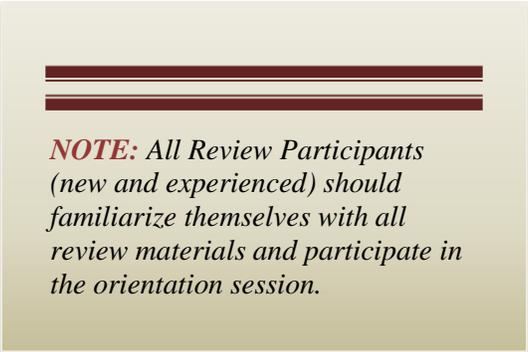
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## 1.1 Welcome to the 2014 justice AmeriCorps Blended Review Handbook

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) has developed this Handbook and other training materials to prepare Review Participants for their role in the 2014 justice AmeriCorps Blended Review Process. In collaboration with the Reviewer Resource Webpage, this Handbook serves as the central reference for preparing for Blended Review activities.

After reading this Handbook and reviewing the required orientation sessions, Reviewers will understand:

- ◆ The expectations for Reviewers and other Review Participants in the review process;
- ◆ The schedule and requirements for participation in the Blended Review process;
- ◆ The importance of fairness and equity in the Review, and how Reviewers fit into that responsibility;
- ◆ How to serve as a productive member in a review panel;
- ◆ The importance of the Selection Criteria and Standards that are considered in the review;
- ◆ How to evaluate applications according to the Selection Criteria and Standards; and
- ◆ How to write meaningful, evaluative comments for applications



**NOTE:** All Review Participants (new and experienced) should familiarize themselves with all review materials and participate in the orientation session.

## 1.2 CNCS and Department of Justice (DOJ)

CNCS is a federal agency with a mission to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering. As the nation's largest grant-making agency supporting national and community service programs and volunteerism, CNCS engages more than five million Americans who serve through its core programs to meet local and community needs in response to President Obama's national call to service initiative, United We Serve through a wide array of service opportunities. Additional information on CNCS and its programs is available online at [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov).

EOIR is a federal agency within the United States Department of Justice (DOJ). Under delegated authority from the Attorney General, EOIR interprets and administers federal immigration laws by conducting immigration court proceedings, appellate reviews, and administrative hearings. EOIR is committed to providing fair, expeditious, and uniform application of the nation's immigration laws in all cases (including cases involving detained aliens, criminal aliens, and aliens seeking asylum as a form of relief from removal), while ensuring the standards of due process and fair treatment for all parties involved.

## 1.3 justice AmeriCorps

Justice AmeriCorps is a program developed in partnership with the Department of Justice through its Executive Office for Immigration Review. The goal of justice AmeriCorps is to provide legal aid to certain unaccompanied minors and to improve the effective and efficient adjudication of immigration removal proceedings involving those children. Applications were solicited from eligible organizations to implement a program that utilizes AmeriCorps members to provide legal services to children under the age of 16, who are not in the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) or the Department of Homeland Security; have received a Notice to Appear in removal proceedings before EOIR; and have not had their cases consolidated with removal proceedings against a parent or legal guardian.

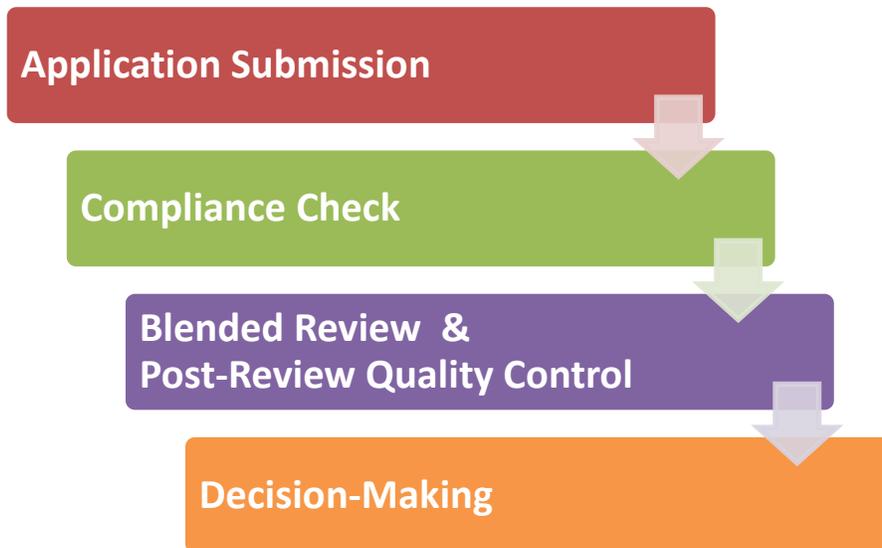
Please reference the *Notice* for additional information and background.

## 2.0 CNCS Grant Application Review Process

### 2.1 The CNCS Grant Making process

CNCS has established a multi-step grant-making process from the appropriation of funds and awarding grants, through monitoring activities, to close out. A summary of this process is presented in Figure 1, *The Life Cycle of Competitive Grants*.

*Figure 1: The Life Cycle of Competitive Grants*



For the justice AmeriCorps competition, CNCS utilizes a Blended Review process model to assess applications, which includes the involvement of Internal CNCS Staff Reviewers, External Review Participants (Reviewers and Panel Coordinators) and Department of Justice (DOJ) Staff Reviewers. A Blended Peer Review, consisting of individual reviews and Panel Discussions, is conducted for each eligible application. Based on the results from the Blended Review the decision-making process is conducted for applications that meet the quality and criteria to advance in the review process. The *Assess Applications* step is where Reviewers contribute to the grant process.

## 2.2 The Grant Application Review Process

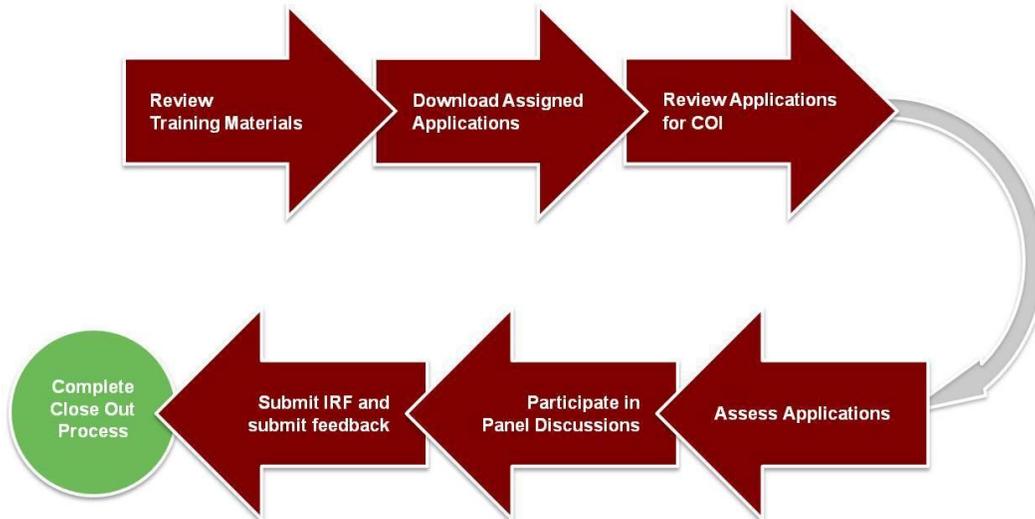
### 2.2.1 The Blended Review Process

The use of Reviewers in evaluating grant applications submitted to CNCS for funding is established in CNCS’s statutes and regulations. This is achieved through the Blended Review process. The purpose of this review process is to identify the highest-quality applications based on the Selection Criteria published in the Notice of Funding Opportunity (*Notice*).

CNCS carefully chooses Review Participants for their expertise and ability to objectively assess the quality of proposed projects. **Blended Reviewers are not making judgments or determinations as to whether and applicant should be funded, but are providing an assessment of the quality of particular aspects of the applications.** Only CNCS and DOJ Executive Staff will make the funding decisions and utilize the review results as input to help inform those decisions.

CNCS developed a process for conducting the Blended Review of grant applications, which is depicted in *Figure 2, The Blended Review Process*. Each step is briefly described below. An in-depth discussion of these steps and activities in the Blended Review process is provided in subsequent sections of this Handbook.

*Figure 2: The Blended Review Process*



#### DETAILS OF THE BLENDED REVIEW PROCESS

- ◆ **Review Training and Orientation Materials:** All Review Participants are required to review the training materials including this Handbook and a series of Orientation Sessions to ensure all Review Participants provide a meaningful review and standardized assessment of the applications.
- ◆ **Receive Assigned Applications:** A set of applications is assigned to each panel; panel members will receive these assigned applications at the start of the review.
- ◆ **Review Applications for COI:** The first step in beginning the review of any application is to determine if there are any potential conflicts of interest. This is a very specific COI review related to a Reviewer’s assigned applications—this is different from the initial COI report provided during the Confirmation process. This COI check must take place within the first day of receiving panel assignments, prior to delving into the technical content of the application in case recusals or reassignments are necessary.
- ◆ **Assess Applications:** Each Reviewer conducts a detailed individual review of each assigned application according to the Selection Criteria. Each Reviewer prepares a draft IRF documenting his/her assessment of each application and submits the IRF to the Panel Coordinator for review and feedback. Reviewers should receive this feedback in advance of the panel discussion.

◆ **Participate in Panel Discussion:** Reviewers participate in a discussion with their panel for each assigned application to share thoughts and discuss their assessments. Each panel has an assigned Panel Coordinator who will help prepare the Reviewers for the discussions, and facilitate the discussions.

- **Panel Discussion Guidance:** Based on the Ratings from each Reviewer’s IRF, the Panel Coordinator will guide the panel through additional discussion on an application’s quality from the various Reviewer perspectives. Panel Coordinators will be responsible to identify significant Rating variances among panelists and guide conversations about the particular Standards during the panel discussions. (Additional guidance in the Panel Coordinator Supplement.) Because each Reviewer provides a particular expertise to the review, the Reviewers may very well have varying opinions on an application’s quality—however, the Panel Coordinator will still ensure that the Selection Criteria were assessed and aligned with the selected IRF ratings and comments appropriately.

In cases where significant discrepancies remain in the final Reviewer Ratings, these applications may continue through a separate quality control review.

◆ **Complete the IRF Quality Assurance Checklist:** Each Panel Coordinator completes the IRF Quality Assurance Checklist form for each application discussed, and utilizes this form to provide feedback on Reviewers’ IRFs.

- The *IRF Quality Assurance Checklist* Resource Webpage for your reference—all panel members should take note of the items that Panel Coordinators will be looking for in this check.

◆ **Complete Close Out Process:** Each Review Participant will complete a close out process including: disposing of confidential review materials properly, as stipulated in the Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Statement; providing feedback in the Review Process Evaluation; and ensuring that all review requirements are satisfied.

## 2.2.2 Roles and Responsibilities

There are several important roles in the Blended Review, and the general responsibilities, along with expectations and interactions, are listed below.

### *Reviewer – External and Federal Staff*

Reviewers evaluate applications according to the published Selection Criteria. Primary responsibilities include: **producing high-quality IRFs** that include clarification items, participating in Panel Discussions, and finalizing the assessment of an application on the IRFs after the Panel Discussion. There will be three Reviewers assigned to each panel: an External Reviewer, a DOJ Staff Reviewer (Federal), and a CNCS Staff Reviewer (Federal).

As some sections of the application pertain specifically to AmeriCorps program management and regulations and require AmeriCorps staff expertise, these items will be completed only by **CNCS Staff Reviewers**. The Assessment Criteria instructions in this handbook and the Individual Review Form (IRF) instructions will provide guidance related to which sections will only be the responsibility of the CNCS Staff Reviewers. **Reference Appendix D of the Reviewer Handbook for DETAILED Guidance on the Individual Reviewer Form.**

Reviewers interact primarily with Panel Coordinators and are expected to be consistently responsive to their requests.

### ***High Quality IRFs SHOULD:***

- *Only include comments that address justice AmeriCorps Selection Criteria*
- *Ensure comments (Strengths and Weaknesses) do not contradict each other*
- *Ensure comments are **aligned with and support the rating selection** for each section.*
- *Be free of spelling and grammar errors*
- *Contain no harsh inflammatory language*

### ***Panel Coordinator (PC)***

Each panel will have a Panel Coordinator whose primary responsibilities are: guide, support and monitor the work of the Reviewers assigned to his/her panel, manage panel logistics, provide feedback to Reviewers on their IRFs, ensuring the quality of the final IRFs and facilitate the Panel Discussions. The Panel Coordinator works in several capacities to ensure that Reviewers complete a thorough, non-biased review that aligns with the Selection Criteria.

Panel Coordinators also serve as the first point of contact by both their Reviewers and GARP Liaisons regarding any concerns, or information for the panel—essentially serving as the primary link between GARP Liaison and the panel. Panel Coordinators interact with Reviewers and help resolve any conflicts among the panel members. If any panel anomalies arise, the Panel Coordinator should immediately notify the GARP Liaison who will determine next steps.

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

Each panel will be assigned a GARP Liaison who will answer all process-related questions and provide all administrative and logistic support to the panel. During the Recruitment and Orientation phases, most of you have already corresponded with your GARP Liaison! The GARP Liaison can provide assistance with obtaining grant applications and administrative forms (electronic versions), access to review resources, reminders throughout the process, and assistance with navigating in eGrants screens. The GARP Liaison is the point of contact (after the Panel Coordinator) for any immediate needs with review materials or any roadblocks encountered in participating in the review and completing the review process.

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

While each panel will have access to an AmeriCorps Program Officer (CNCS Staff Reviewer), regarding AmeriCorps program requirements; the Panel Coordinator will have access to a Program Officer Liaison as an additional programmatic resource for clarification of the Blended Review Criteria and Standards.

## 3.0 Ensuring Equitable Reviews

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An essential goal of the Blended Review process is ensuring that each grant application submitted for funding consideration is evaluated based on a fair and equitable process in the interest of transparency and integrity of the full grant process.

### 3.1 Bias

Bias is a preference or inclination that may inhibit impartial judgment or objectivity. One's bias is not limited to a negative judgment, or dislike of an application; it is more often found in favor, or an unfounded positive preference of an applicant or an aspect of an application.

Often individuals are unaware of having a bias, and it may be flagged by another Review Participant, based on a comment made during discussion, or a consistent inflation or deflation in an assessment. Biases are often rooted in opinions and past experiences—which Reviewers are asked to bring in a structured format to this review. Utilizing one's opinion in some ways, but not in others can be difficult to separate—especially as it is likely that a positive inclination or preference may be founded in a passion and excitement about a program. It is important that Reviewers are open to reconsideration should the issue of potential bias come to light. The Panel Coordinator also remains objective throughout the Review, and they may address a concern of bias with panel members during the review.

**To avoid the insertion of bias, Reviewers are asked to base their assessments solely on the facts and assertions contained in the application;** return to re-evaluate an application, if needed; eliminate consideration of outside sources or information; and exercise consideration and respect throughout the review.

### 3.2 Conflict of Interest

CNCS implements several procedures throughout the review process to ensure fair and equitable reviews. One such procedure is requiring all Reviewers to report any actual or potential conflicts of interest concerning the competition and applications assigned to them. *A conflict of interest is a situation in which conflict exists between one's private interest and official responsibilities.* Such competing interests can make it difficult for a Reviewer to fulfill his/her duties impartially. A conflict of interest can exist even if no unethical or improper act results from it.

Each Review Participant must complete a Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Statement (COI Form) for the applications they are assigned to review. This is found on the Reviewer Resource Webpage

(<http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/funding-opportunities/justice-ameri-corps-review>)

Because of the unique nature of the review process and the sensitivity of the information being reviewed, **CNCS determines the potential for both Direct (actual) and Indirect (perceived) conflicts of interest as defined below.**

- ◆ A direct conflict of interest – often through personal involvement, connection to, or benefit from an application submitted to CNCS
- ◆ An indirect conflict of interest – through various forms of affiliation, personally or professionally with an applicant institution

Prior to reviewing any grant applications, Reviewers must inform CNCS of any potential conflicts of interest or appearances thereof. If any potential conflict of interest arises during review of an application, Reviewers must immediately notify the Panel Coordinator or GARP Liaison. This notification should happen via email. CNCS will determine how to handle any appearances of perceived or actual conflicts of interest and will inform the Reviewer regarding what further steps, if any, to take. It is possible that an individual will not be able to serve as a Reviewer or Panel Coordinator for this grant competition if a conflict of interest or even the *appearance* of one exists.

When examining conflicts of interest, a Reviewer should also treat the following people's interests as their own: any affiliation or relationship of a spouse, minor child, a relative living in the immediate household, or anyone

who is legally a partner with any of the relationships above. Examples of potentially biasing affiliations or relationships are listed below (see the COI Statement for more information).

### A Reviewer's personal submission of an application to CNCS

- ◆ **Affiliation with an applicant institution. A conflict may be present if a Reviewer has/holds (a):**
  - Any formal or informal employment arrangement, is being considered for employment, or is consulting, advising, or has other similar affiliation at the institution
  - Current membership on a visiting committee, board or similar body at the institution
  - Current enrollment as a student
  - Received and retained an honorarium or award from the institution within the last 12 months
  - Personal financial interest that would be affected by the outcome of this grant competition
  - Organization that is a potential sub-recipient, named in an intermediary application (as a pre-selected subgrantee), or is an actual applicant in the pre-award competition conducted by an intermediary organization applying for this competition (Includes State Commissions)
  
- ◆ **Relationship with someone who has personal interest in the proposal or other application, such as:**
  - Related by marriage or through family membership
  - Past or present business, professional, academic, volunteer or personal relationship
  - Employment at the institution within the last 12 months
  - Collaboration on a project or on a book, article, report or paper within the last 48 months

## 3.3 Confidentiality

The designation as a Review Participant provides access to information not generally available to the public and accords Reviewers with special professional and ethical responsibilities. Review Participants are given access to information about applicants for use only during the evaluation process and for discussion only with fellow panel members and CNCS personnel. The information cannot be used for personal benefit or made available for the benefit of any other individual or organization. Reviewers can share general information about CNCS.

After the panel is complete, Reviewers may maintain archival copies of review-related information if they store them in a manner consistent with Reviewers' confidentiality obligations. Otherwise, all review-related information must be disposed of in a manner consistent with confidentiality obligations.

CNCS is committed to the Open Government policy, and may make the names of External Reviewers available to the public after awards are made. However, all Reviewers' confidentiality with regard to the specific applications reviewed is maintained: Review Participant's names for the application reviews will be protected to the extent provided by law.

Details regarding confidentiality obligations are provided and discussed in the *Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Statement for Review Participants* (<http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/funding-opportunities/justice-ameri-corps-review>).

## 3.4 Verify Page Limits for Equity for all Applicants

Applications are subject to a 15-page limit. According to the *Notice*:

Applications may not exceed 15 pages for the Narratives, including the Executive Summary and SF 424 Facesheet, as the pages print out from eGrants. CNCS strongly encourages applicants to print out the application prior to submitting it to check that the application does not exceed the page limit. This limit does not include the budget, performance measures, evaluation plan or required supplementary materials (e.g. organizational chart, logic model worksheet).

**Reviewers will not consider submitted material that is over the page limit, even if eGrants allows an applicant to enter and submit text over the limit.** Note that the Performance Measures are printed at the *end* of the application narrative—if any panel has an application that exceeds the 15-page limit, the Panel Coordinator needs to contact the GARP Liaison for a final determination and guidance. Review Participants must follow CNCS guidance, as this is **a matter of equity to all applicants**.

## 4.0 Reviewing the 2014 justice AmeriCorps Applications

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Prior to commencing the grant application review process, Reviewers must complete the orientation session requirements and become familiar with key background material. The Notice of Federal Funding Opportunity (*Notice*) and the Application Instructions govern the 2014 justice AmeriCorps grant competition. These documents detail the requirements and Selection Criteria that applicants use to write their applications, and that Reviewers use to evaluate the applications. Understanding of the *Notice* is critical to ensuring a fair, successful and objective review.

The 2014 justice AmeriCorps Blended Review is based on a non-consensus model – meaning the panel does not need to reach consensus (a unified group agreement) regarding the assessment of an application. Different perspectives and opinions are expected and welcomed.

Each Reviewer is assigned to a panel consisting of three Reviewers and a Panel Coordinator. Each panel is assigned between 3 and 5 applications, which are reviewed individually by each Reviewer and then discussed collectively by the entire panel on a rolling basis.

### 4.1 Reviewer Timeline

The Blended Review (excluding orientation sessions and other preliminary steps) spans 8 Business Days. Reference the *Timeline and Milestones* document on the Reviewer Resource Webpage for the complete snapshot of milestones for Review Participants. However, each panel is different, and the Panel Coordinator will lead the panel with additional dates and details for each panel.

### 4.2 The 2014 justice AmeriCorps Selection Criteria

Each application is evaluated based on the justice AmeriCorps Selection Criteria (*see Assessment Criteria: beginning page 16 –in the Notice*).

In order to properly assess the program design and member activities we expect to see in the submitted applications, please refer to the following **Supplemental Information** provided by the Department of Justice:

**1) 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 address such cases.**

The objectives for the grants to improve legal representation for Unaccompanied Children in Immigration Proceedings are to:

- Provide legal services to Unaccompanied Children in Immigration Proceedings;
- Increase the effective and efficient adjudication of immigration court cases involving those children;
- Facilitate identification of Unaccompanied Children who have been victims of abuse, trafficking, or trauma or who may be abused, trafficked, or traumatized upon return to their country of nationality or last habitual residence;
- Refer suspected cases of abuse, trafficking, and trauma to appropriate law enforcement authorities and/or appropriate support services;
- Build pro bono capacity to support and represent the population of unaccompanied children in the immigration court location(s) in which members will serve; and
- Strengthen national service so that participants engaged in supported programs consistently find satisfaction, meaning, and opportunity to continue to serve this population at other times in their legal careers.

## 2) What should a reviewer understand about adjudication of immigration court cases?

EOIR contains the nation's immigration courts (known as the Office of the Chief Immigration Judge) and the country's main immigration appellate body, the Board of Immigration Appeals.

EOIR has 59 immigration courts throughout the country and 245 immigration judges.

### *General Process*

DHS initiates removal proceedings when it serves the individual with a charging document, called a Notice to Appear (NTA), and files that NTA with one of EOIR's immigration courts.

When the immigration court receives the NTA from DHS, the court schedules a removal hearing before an immigration judge. There may be one or multiple hearings, depending on what happens in the case.

Removal proceedings begin with a master calendar hearing, where the immigration judge ensures the individual understands the alleged immigration law violations. Then, generally, the immigration judge will schedule an individual hearing, during which both parties present the merits of the case to the immigration judge.

The outcome of many removal proceedings depends on whether the individual is eligible for relief from removal.

### *Procedures for Children*

ICE generally files a NTA with the court about 60 days after the child comes into DHS custody, which allows the child's case to begin in the court location where the child will be residing, which may be far from where the child is apprehended.

Cases involving juveniles are placed on the court's juvenile docket. Twenty-six immigration courts have these dockets actively hearing cases, with more courts expected to activate juvenile dockets in the coming months.

All immigration judges are trained and able to handle juvenile dockets as necessary. The cases proceed under the laws that apply to adults, but judges employ their training to take into consideration the young and possibly vulnerable person standing before them.

Many of the types of relief from removal that may be available to unaccompanied children are adjudicated outside of the immigration court. These types of relief from removal include Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, Asylum, and visas for victims of trafficking. Therefore, immigration court cases involving UAC with applications to be adjudicated outside of immigration court are generally administratively closed pending a decision on the application.

## 4.2.1 Blended Review Selection Criteria

Reviewers are required to familiarize themselves with the Selection Criteria in this guidance to ensure that the elements considered in their assessment of each application are based on the Selection Criteria. Note that not all Selection Criteria will be considered as part of the Blended Review—the **Individual Review Form** and the Orientation Sessions provide the best guidance on which criteria you will need to consider.

## 4.2.2 Consideration of the Performance Measures during External Review

Each applicant's Performance Measures are included at the end of their 424 Narrative. The content from the Performance Measures can be read, but will primarily be assessments by the CNCS Staff Reviewers as discussed in the Selection Criteria Orientation Session. In general, Reviewers should *not* assess, or comment on the structure of the Performance Measures.

## 4.2.3 Consideration Past Performance during External Review

Although all Reviewers read the entire application, External Reviewers and DOJ Staff Reviewers are responsible for evaluating specific criteria in the application (Program Design and a portion of Organizational

Capability). Reference **Appendix D of the Reviewer Handbook** for DETAILED Guidance on the Individual Reviewer Form.

### 4.3 Conducting the Individual Review

Reviewers read each application, focusing on the quality of the applicant’s response to the Selection Criteria. In an application, the applicants provide responses in three categories: (1) Program Design, (2) Organizational Capability, and (3) Cost Effectiveness/Budget Adequacy; as well as Performance Measures. The Required Additional Documents (Organizational Chart and Logic Model Worksheet) are also part of the application. Reviewers then assess the quality of each criterion in the application, assign a Rating to each element, and note evaluative comments of the application’s significant strengths and weaknesses of the applicant’s proposal as it relates to the Selection Criteria.

Significant Strengths & Weaknesses
An identified Strength or Weakness that has an effect on the overall quality of the applicant’s response to the Criteria. A significant Strength or Weakness often shows that the applicant has an understanding (or lack) of a key issue in program implementation or management. <b>Identifying Significant Strengths and Significant Weaknesses of an application is valued, rather than the inclusion of numerous low-impact strengths and weaknesses. In all cases, the Significant Strength or Weakness identified should align with or support the selected Rating.</b>

#### 4.3.1 Reading the Applications

Applications are generally reviewed in two groups; and it is important to read the applications in the order that the panel discusses them. The Reviewer’s goal is to focus on assessing how well applicant has addressed the Selection Criteria. Assigned applications will be made available on the first day of the Review Period: Tuesday, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

Reviewers do not have to produce one or more “highly-rated” applications. Although applicants are competing against each other, **Reviewers should consider the applications’ significant strengths and weaknesses when measured against the Selection Criteria, NOT measured against other applications.** The goal for Reviewers when reading an application is to seek out information in the application that enables them to answer the following questions:

- ◆ Does the application address the Selection Criteria?
  - If yes, to what degree and what is the quality/feasibility of what is proposed?
  - If not, what is lacking or unclear?

Some information related to the criteria may be found in different sections of the proposal. In as much as the information relates to the quality of the proposal in addressing the specific criteria, it should be considered. It is equally important not to assess a single negative component of the proposal under multiple criteria.

#### 4.3.2 Completing the Individual Reviewer Form (IRF)

Reviewers need to fill out the Individual Review Form (IRF) for each application they read to document review results. The individual Review Form captures the reviewer’s assessment of an application, significant strengths and weaknesses used for applicant feedback, and any necessary items necessary for the clarification process. A copy of the IRF is available on the CNCS Reviewer Resource Web page: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/funding-opportunities/justice-ameri-corps-review>.

*Table 2: Synopsis of IRF*

	Purpose	Audience	Use	Content
<b>Individual Reviewer Form</b>  <i>(Reviewers)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Document a Reviewer’s individual assessment of one application</li> <li>■ Provide useful feedback to decision makers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Panel Coordinator</li> <li>■ CNCS &amp; DOJ Staff</li> <li>■ Public (potentially subject to FOIA)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Identifies strengths and weaknesses in an application</li> <li>■ Used to inform decision-making process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Comments and Ratings on the application’s quality</li> </ul>

All Reviewers must complete an IRF for each application assigned to their panel:

(Please be sure to review the detailed “Instructions and Tips” tab of the IRF.)

1. **Save, enable Macros, and Label** the IRF appropriately
2. **Rate** the application (utilizing the Review Rubric)
3. Providing **comments** on strengths and weaknesses for the element that aligns with the rating selected

Process to complete the Individual Review Form:

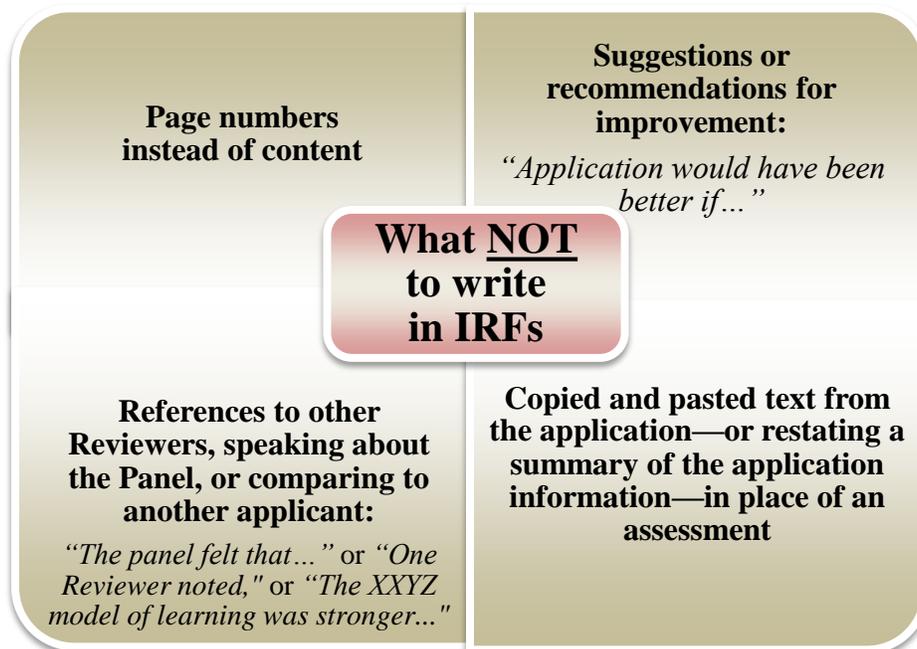
1. Complete draft IRF (reference Appendix D of the Review Handbook for the DETAILED GUIDANCE).
  - a. The form is in Excel format with each cell providing you with either a space to enter information or with a drop-down menu. When you click on the individual cell, you will see Help text that can assist you in completing the information. Please use the IRF & Review Rubric, the Review Handbook, and, when necessary, the *Notice* when conducting the review and assessment.
2. email to Panel Coordinator (PC) for review
3. Receive feedback from Panel Coordinator and address/incorporate prior to Panel Discussion
4. Participate in Panel Discussion

**Panel Coordinators will be able to complete the Panel Coordinator Notes after this point.**

5. Revise IRF to reflect final assessment (and apply concepts to new material that reflects the PC Feedback)
6. Finalize IRF and send to PC.

In the IRF, the Reviewer evaluates the extent to which the application meets the selection criteria as defined in the *Notice*. Each of the Ratings are provided in the Review Rubric (available on the *Reviewer Resource Webpage*, and as a separate Tab in the IRF.) The Reviewer’s assessment should be based on their evaluation of the quality of the applicant’s response to the Selection Criteria. Reviewer comments will be used for Applicant Feedback. It is important that the comments are a reflection of the rating the Reviewer assigned that criterion so the applicant can understand the assessment.

Although each application may contain many strengths and weaknesses, Reviewers are only expected to list the **significant** ones. It is important to keep in mind what types of information Reviewers should NOT assess or comment on. The graphic below provides examples.



If a Reviewer is concerned that they did not understand something in the application, they should not presume to know what the applicant meant to say or tried to say.

Instead, the Reviewer should assess the application based on what they did understand; anything that is unclear should be addressed during the Panel Discussion (or *noted as unclear* in the IRF comments). Similarly, Reviewers should exercise caution about how they reference information that was in other parts of the application. Because applicants might often include information in another narrative section that speaks directly to the Criteria, Reviewers **should** note the information that was addressed in another section (within the page limit) and it should be considered. Reviewers **should not**, however, comment on the applicant’s budget or the structure of the Performance Measures if it does not relate to the relevant Selection Criteria.

#### 4.4 Participating in Panel Discussions

After the individual reviews for each group of applications have been completed, the panels will convene by conference calls to discuss each application within that group. The purpose of the Panel Discussion is to share thoughts and discuss each Reviewer’s assessment of the application based on the Selection Criteria. While consensus is not a requirement of the Panel Discussion, Reviewers should strive to come to a general common understanding of the application quality. Reviewers are asked to engage in discussion about the Criteria and consider the assessments and findings of fellow panel members. The discussion should cover each of the relevant elements of the applicant’s Program Design, and explore the points of agreement and disagreement among Reviewer IRFs.

After a Panel Discussion has been completed for all assigned applications, each Reviewer revises and finalizes his/her IRF to reflect any changes to the original assessment. Through discussion, other panel members may provide information that changes the Reviewer’s initial assessment of the proposal. This is the reason for the discussion and changing a rating based on a new perspective is perfectly valid. The Panel Coordinator will complete a Panel Coordinator Note for each application (based on the review for that application) and submit the note with the final Review Products at the conclusion of the review.

##### 4.4.1 Tips for Productive Panel Discussions

During the Panel Discussion, all Reviewers and the Panel Coordinator participate on the conference line. The average time for discussion is expected to be about 30 minutes per application. Panels will engage in discussion focused on the comments, assessments and ratings resulting from the individual reviews. The Panel Discussion should be well rounded and focused on a discussion of the quality of the application based on the Selection Criteria—the **discussion should not revolve solely around the areas where panel members provided differing ratings** for a section.

Reviewers may agree, disagree, clarify individual assessments and misunderstandings, and ask questions while collectively discussing an application. Based on these discussions, Reviewers may come to view aspects of the

#### ***Helpful Tips on How to be an Effective Panel Member:***

- *Review and be familiar with the Notice, the Selection Criteria, the Reviewer Rubric and other relevant documents.*
- *Allow the Panel Coordinator to lead; recognize the importance of the Panel Coordinator role and respect it.*
- *Have both the application and completed IRF ready for each discussion.*
- *Ask others to explain or clarify their positions and be an active listener. Do not be afraid to ask questions.*
- *Focus on the content of what is being said and not the person.*
- *Participate actively in the discussion, using supporting evidence from the application to emphasize points.*
- *Be receptive to opposing viewpoints and put emotions aside.*
- *Answer other panel members’ questions and challenges cordially and diplomatically.*
- *Expect to revisit the IRFs and make revisions on several occasions before finalizing the review product.*

application differently than they did during the individual review. Preparedness, tact, patience and active participation are just some of the ways Reviewers can assist in the process of assessing applications, and in making Panel Discussions meaningful.

## 4.5 Finalizing IRFs

To submit an IRF as final: revisit the IRFs and make any appropriate amendments to comments or ratings to reflect a conclusive assessment. Email final version to your PC for approval. IRF

## 4.6 Completing the Close-Out Process

After all review materials are final, all Reviewers and Panel Coordinators will complete their individual close outs. A close out is completed when Panel Coordinators ensure that all IRFs meet the requirements for the finalizing the IRF and performing a quality assurance:

- Reviewing IRF for improper language
- Ensuring Ratings are correctly marked on the IRF
- Gathering and Labeling (according to the required naming convention) all final Review Products (IRFs, PC Notes...)
- Submitting all final Review Products to the PC GARP Liaison
- Completing and submitting the 2014 justice AmeriCorps Blended Review Process Evaluation. CNCS sends a URL for the evaluation form after the review has ended.

CNCS confirms that each Review Participant has satisfied the requirements of the review, as described in the Participation Agreement. Honoraria checks for External Reviewers will be paid electronically via direct deposit within 30 days after CNCS sends confirmation that all requirements stated in the Participation Agreement are satisfactorily completed. Please consult the Participation Agreement and the information covered in the Orientation Sessions for conditions that may prevent an External Reviewer from receiving part or all of their honorarium payment.

**Thank you for serving as a Reviewer in the 2014 justice AmeriCorps  
Blended Review!**

## 5.0 Supplement for Panel Coordinators

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All Panel Coordinators are responsible for reading the 2014 AmeriCorps Blended Review Handbook and completing the required orientation sessions. It is also important to carefully read the Selection Criteria as laid out in the 2014 AmeriCorps Notice of Federal Funding Opportunity (*Notice*). Understanding these criteria is critical to being able to provide guidance to panel members and to ensure that the Selection Criteria are adequately considered and discussed in the review. To be an effective Panel Coordinator, one must be knowledgeable not only about the AmeriCorps review process, but also about the Reviewers' role and activities.

### 5.1 Overview of the Panel Coordinator Role

The Panel Coordinator plays a key role in the successful implementation of the Blended Review, particularly with ensuring the timely delivery of quality review products to CNCS. Key aspects of the Panel Coordinator's role in the review process include:

- ◆ Managing the panel's activities in order to meet the review schedule
- ◆ Serving as the primary link between panel members and CNCS Staff
- ◆ Facilitating Panel Discussions and fostering a climate of respect within the panel
- ◆ Providing the panel with constructive and effective guidance in both the review process and the technical aspects of the review
- ◆ Ensuring Reviewers address the Selection Criteria in their IRFs and Panel Discussions adequately
- ◆ Providing timely and consistent feedback to Reviewers on the quality of their review forms
- ◆ Compiling the review results (comments, ratings) at varying times during the review to inform the panel and CNCS Staff of the review panel's progress
- ◆ Review final IRFs to ensure quality
- ◆ Completing *Panel Coordinator Notes* to document any issues with the review of each application
- ◆ Completing the IRF Quality Assurance Checklist for each application

Carefully read the Panel Coordinator Participation Agreement specifying the expectations of the Panel Coordinator role. For any questions, please email [PeerReviewers@cns.gov](mailto:PeerReviewers@cns.gov). Emails to this address are received by GARP support staff and every effort is made to respond within one business day.

### 5.2 Preparing for the 2014 justice AmeriCorps Grant Application Review

#### 5.2.1 Panel Coordinator Timeline

The Blended Review process (excluding Orientation Sessions and other preliminary steps) spans 8 business days. Panel Coordinators should utilize the central *Timeline and Milestones* document to develop their own planning timeline for completing all of the Panel Coordinator Review Responsibilities.

#### 5.2.2 Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality

Even though Panel Coordinators do not evaluate the AmeriCorps applications directly, they are still subject to the confidentiality and conflict of interest considerations outlined in the *Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Statement for Review Participants* (COI Statement). The COI Statement is available on the Reviewer Resource Webpage.

As soon as the Panel Coordinator's assigned applications are available, they should access and examine each of the assigned applications for potential conflicts. If the Panel Coordinator suspects a conflict or has a question, they should contact CNCS immediately and let the staff determine whether a conflict does indeed exist. If CNCS determines that there is a conflict, CNCS Staff will provide the Panel Coordinator with appropriate guidance. Panel Coordinators complete and submit the COI Statement in advance of the start of the review.

### 5.2.3 Panel Introduction Call

The Panel Coordinator’s role in the Panel Introduction Call is to organize and begin leading the panel to prepare for the review. **This call should take place within 24 hours of receiving panel assignments!** It is important to contact the assigned Reviewers and create the review schedule as early as possible. Panel Coordinators are assigned a panel of up to three Reviewers with varying fields and levels of expertise. Once the contact information for the panel Reviewers is available, Panel Coordinators should reach out to introduce themselves and initiate the planning process for the Panel Introduction Call and subsequent Panel Discussions. Following are suggested agenda topics for the Panel Introduction Call:

- ◆ Allow each Reviewer to give his/her background and level of experience with reviews
- ◆ Establish optimal means of communication for each Reviewer (e.g., preferred email address, phone number)
- ◆ Review the expectations and schedule, and work together (while discussing the Timelines) to set the dates and times of the Panel Discussions
  - Encourage flexibility and a commitment to the review schedule and needs
  - Discuss and consider time zones for each person, and general “ideal times” for availability and responsiveness
- ◆ Ensure that everyone is reading the applications in the same order (any order is fine: alphabetically, as they appear in the panel assignment email, etc.)

### 5.3 Setting up The Panel for Success

#### Ensuring that Reviewers complete work on time

Setting up for success:

- ◆ Create group agreements that include completing the work on time
  - Be sure all Reviewers voice their perspective in creating shared group agreements, expectations and schedule. If there are differing expectations, this is the best time to address the standards and expectations of CNCS and the Panel Coordinator.
- ◆ Monitor and check in with panel members via email
  - Send out updates of information and reminders of milestones that the group agreed to. (“Remember, by the end of today, everyone should have read their first three applications and written at least one Individual Reviewer Form!”).
- ◆ As a group, create a realistic schedule for completion that attempts to consider everyone’s needs
  - Remind the Reviewers to keep their Timetable handy, and refer to it frequently
- ◆ Remind Reviewers of time commitment and encourage them to set aside or otherwise minimize major distractions (e.g., postpone activities that can be done another time)
- ◆ Check in periodically to see if the agreed schedule is still realistic and achievable (and modify if needed)

***NOTE:*** See the ***Panel Intro Call Agenda*** document for a detailed reference of what to cover on this important call.

Interventions:

- ◆ Remind group of agreed-upon schedule, emphasizing that the reasoning behind pacing themselves is to prevent them from becoming overwhelmed and ensuring that each application has received the fairest quality review from the panel

- ◆ *Next step:* speak with each Reviewer individually to see how to help him/her get work done on time. Give heads up to the GARP Liaison
- ◆ *Final action:* remind each Reviewer that Panel Coordinators need to notify the GARP Liaison if the work is not completed satisfactorily by the deadline

### Ensuring that Individual Reviewer Forms are quality products

Setting up for success:

- ◆ Create group agreements that include preparing thoughtful and thorough IRFs (refer to the *IRF Quality Assurance Checklist*)
- ◆ Review the Selection Criteria by which each application should be evaluated
- ◆ Acknowledge that “details” may be harder for some work styles than others but again, a certain level of detail is necessary for this review

Interventions:

- ◆ *Next step:* speak with the Reviewers individually and go through specific areas of improvement for the IRF

### Ensuring Reviewer responsiveness to phone calls and/or emails

Setting up for success:

- ◆ Talk with panels to establish a response time norm. (Example: all emails will be responded to within eight hours, excluding weekends.)
- ◆ Set precedent of asking Reviewers to “reply to confirm” they have received an email
- ◆ Confirm contact lists in the beginning with agreements that they must be available:
  - Iterate that most communication will be via email and requires response
  - Confirm location of listed phone number (work/home/cell)
  - General hours of group availability
  - Communicate single days, or hours that a Reviewer is not available
  - Discuss time zones, and general conflicting obligations (should not be numerous or extensive)
- ◆ Respond promptly when contacted by Reviewers

Interventions:

- ◆ If Reviewer is non-responsive to one means of contact, try an alternative format (e.g., if first contact was through email, try the phone)
- ◆ Contact GARP Liaison to give a heads-up if a Reviewer has been non-responsive to attempts

### Ensuring that Reviewers have read *the Notice* and key documents

Setting up for success:

- ◆ Emphasize the need for familiarity with *the Notice* and related documents to effectively review the applications
- ◆ Revisit the roles and responsibilities and Selection Criteria by which each application should be evaluated

Interventions:

- ◆ Speak with Reviewer of concern individually to see if he/she understands *the Notice*, potentially highlighting a comment that was made in contradiction with a Notice Requirement
- ◆ Offer to review the Notice Requirements together if it might help
- ◆ Final step: Contact GARP Liaison to notify them of the issue

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**NOTE:** A Panel Coordinator’s responsibility is to the panel as a whole. If one panel member’s needs are taking away from the panel as a whole, seek help from your GARP Liaison.

### **Creating equal “air” time for all Reviewers in the Panel Discussion**

Setting up for success:

- ◆ Begin with discussion on the general aspects of the application, moving toward the specific aspects to encourage a structured objective discussion of the facts
- ◆ Take note of how each Reviewer reacts to conflict or disagreements
- ◆ Work to include the entire panel in the discussion for 100% participation
- ◆ At the outset of each discussion remind the panel of the group agreements
- ◆ Set the tone during the first discussion, communicating one’s facilitation style and the expectation for participation—calling on each Reviewer to state his/her opinions to set the precedent
- ◆ Acknowledge and state that different work styles may participate differently but that all must have an equal opportunity and equal contribution to the discussion

Interventions:

- ◆ Step in when group members are not able to keep each other engaged. Structure and lead discussion so that each Reviewer takes a turn to state his/her comments on the application
- ◆ Actively draw in any Reviewer who seems withdrawn and find out what they would like to contribute
- ◆ Step in when the group is not able to maintain balanced participation
- ◆ Facilitate the conversation flow as needed (e.g., gently deflect a dominating person’s input by allowing others to speak)

### **Preventing difficult interactions among panel member(s) due to personality conflicts (Panel Coordinators should document this in the *Panel Coordinator Notes*)**

Setting up for success:

- ◆ Address the application’s strengths or weaknesses more than the Reviewer’s opinions
- ◆ Ask Reviewers to provide specific reference from application, to encourage objectivity
- ◆ Keep the discussions moving. If a point of strong disagreement occurs, encourage productive discussion about the Selection Criteria. Then move to another point once the various assessments have been stated

Interventions:

- ◆ Acknowledge the issue and provide guidance; remind panel to focus on what is in the proposal and the relevant points
- ◆ Use humor, if appropriate, to break tension. Encourage humor from others
- ◆ Talk with Reviewer privately and ask if something is bothering them – let him/her express it. Ask what the panel member would like to do about it.
- ◆ Remind the panel to do what is best for the sake of the applicant

### **Preventing Review bias (Panel Coordinators should document this in the *Panel Coordinator Notes*)**

Setting up for success:

- ◆ Reiterate Reviewer roles and responsibilities, and remind each panel member about his/her responsibility to give each application a fair and objective review

Interventions:

- ◆ Remind the group as a whole that there is that fine line between contributing their expertise and crossing into bias, so step back and ask them to see if the point they are making may be coming from a bias. Still value their perspective but let them decide.
- ◆ Ask Reviewers to provide evidence or elaboration to substantiate his/her point
- ◆ Refer to the Rubric details, and the Selection Criteria when asking Reviewers to reconsider the point
- ◆ Use humor, when appropriate, to bring about awareness of bias

## Assisting Reviewers who appear to struggle with the technical or other requirements of the review

Setting up for success:

- ◆ Check in regularly with panel members both as a group and individually
- ◆ Monitor their progress in writing their IRFs
- ◆ Ask: “How can I assist you?”

Interventions:

- ◆ Set up a time to work individually with that panel member
- ◆ Contact the GARP Liaison
- ◆ Remember that a Panel Coordinator’s responsibility is to the panel as a whole. If one panel member’s needs are taking away from the panel as a whole, seek help from the GARP Liaison.

### 5.4 Coordinating the Panel

Panel Coordinators monitor and guide the Reviewers to ensure engaging discussions that reflects the panel’s assessment of each assigned application. Both points of agreement and disagreement should be considered in the Panel Discussion. All discussion should revolve around the requirements of the Selection Criteria.

Reaching consensus or agreement on comments and ratings in the application is not the purpose of the Panel Discussion. Reviewers should discuss their ratings and assessments in full consideration of other opinions and experience levels without the pressure of aligning their results. Based on the discussion, Reviewers will need to return to their IRFs to revise (if necessary) and finalize their assessments to reflect their final opinion.

The entire Blended Review is conducted remotely using a Field Review model. Several aspects of the Field Review model can make the Panel Coordinator’s role somewhat challenging:

- ◆ The overlap of review tasks in a condensed timeframe
- ◆ The absence of face-to-face interaction for communication and discussions
- ◆ The necessity to facilitate discussions among three people for a common goal
- ◆ Coordinating schedules of four people (including the Panel Coordinator) to allow them to perform review functions while also carrying on their lives (in different time zones)

#### 5.4.1 Interacting with the Program Officer Liaison

The CNCS Staff Reviewer on each panel is AmeriCorps Program Officer that will serve as the panel’s primary resource regarding programmatic (AmeriCorps specific) inquiries and clarification of Criteria and Standards.. Additionally, the Panel Coordinator will have access to a Program Officer Liaison (POL).

**POLs will not be reviewing IRFs for overall quality (this is the Panel Coordinator’s responsibility), and will be available only as an additional consultative resource.**

#### 5.4.2 Facilitating the Panel Discussion

- ◆ **Participate in Panel Discussion:** Reviewers participate in a discussion with their panel for each assigned application to share thoughts and discuss their assessments. Each panel has an assigned Panel Coordinator who will help prepare the Reviewers for the discussions, and facilitate the discussions.
  - **Panel Discussion Guidance:** Based on the Ratings from each Reviewer’s IRF, the Panel Coordinator will guide the panel through additional discussion on an application’s quality. Panel Coordinators will be responsible to identify significant Rating variances among panelists and guide conversations about the particular Standards during the panel discussions.

For each application reviewed:

1. Panel Coordinators will also lead discussions about the significant strengths and weaknesses identified by reviewers related to Problem/Need; AmeriCorps Members as Highly Effective Means to Solve

Community Problems, Evidence Base, and Measurable Community Impact; and Past Performance. Reviewers may take notes and later choose to adjust the comments (Significant Strengths and Weaknesses fields) or Ratings in the Individual Review Form as a result of these discussions.

In addition, in cases where significant Rating variances exist between Reviewers' findings on a particular application:

- Panel Coordinators should focus on the instances where Reviewers' Ratings have a variance of differed by two or more Rating levels (e.g., during review of Application A, one reviewer scored criterion X as "Meets the Standard" while another reviewer scored criterion X as "Does Not Meet the Standard At All") will be considered to have significant Rating variance.
- Panel Coordinators can use an excel chart or other tool to help them view and cross-compare the ratings selected by the reviewers in their panel for each individual review criterion.
- The panel discussions should then focus around the Criteria and Standards with the variance to ensure that all Reviewers have a common understanding of the Standard, the Rubric, and have not missed any information provided in the application.
- Reviewers will have the option to change their Ratings as a result of the discussions; however, Reviewers are not required to come to consensus on the Ratings.

In cases where significant discrepancies remain in the final Reviewer Ratings, these applications may continue through a separate quality control review.

#### 5.4.3 Expectations for the Panel Discussion

As the Panel Coordinator, the Panel Discussions should revolve around the Selection Criteria, Standards, and Rubric—utilize the IRF and the Reviewer Rubric as needed to keep panel members focused on the appropriate elements and weights. It is important to constructively communicate observations and expectations, while encouraging panel members to do the same. The expectation is a smooth, timely and organized process that results in a fair, objective and quality assessment of the applicant's proposal. Reviewers may agree, disagree, clarify individual assessments and misunderstandings, and ask questions while collectively discussing an application. Reviewers may have the same rating for applications, but different rationale for their ratings, and/or Reviewers may take note of the same issues but apply or weigh them differently. Therefore, it is important to encourage discussion among panel members to ensure application strengths and weaknesses are viewed considering the same criteria. The diversity of panel members' expertise and backgrounds lends itself to valuable Panel Discussions. However, it is important to keep in mind that the discussion should extend beyond *areas of disagreement or differing ratings*.

CNCS does not provide specific requirements for the Panel Discussions, and the following are offered only as suggestions:

- ◆ Utilize online scheduling tools (such as Doodle, ScheduleOnce, etc. according to the panel's preference) to coordinate schedules for arranging the calls.
- ◆ Provide an agenda prior to the call and begin the call by reviewing the agenda to ensure everyone has the same expectations.
- ◆ Begin the discussion of the application by providing a summary of the proposed project.
- ◆ Identify a specific order for each Reviewer to summarize his/her individual evaluation.
- ◆ Specify set time limits for each Reviewer and/or each application.

Facilitating Panel Discussions from a distance, via telephone, has some unique challenges. Some of these challenges include: background noise (or conversely, muted phones, and sparse participation), competing distractions (driving, multi-tasking, or other persons nearby), not being able to observe body language, technology barriers, and possible confusion about scheduled times due to time zone differences. Panel Coordinators need to pay close attention to human dynamics and signals from the panel members to facilitate effectively, and be extra rigorous in ensuring that panel communications are clear and understood by all. Complete a Panel Coordinator Note for each application after the Panel Discussion has occurred. (These are due at the end of the review as a final Close-Out product.)

***Panel Coordinator Challenges and Possible Solutions***

Challenge	Possible Solutions
<b>Starting calls on time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Send email reminders in advance of call.</li> <li>• Panelists should have a call-in number, application(s) being discussed, and relevant notes from the Panel Coordinator available before the call start time.</li> </ul>
<b>Panel members speaking over each other</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach agreement on how panel members will be recognized to speak.</li> <li>• If a particular Reviewer is especially experiencing this problem, a private conversation may be in order.</li> </ul>
<b>Not having a visual that everyone can see (e.g., an evolving list of significant strengths and weaknesses for the application)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggest that everyone is at a computer or has printed documents on hand during discussion.</li> <li>• Repeat/restate a comment made to be sure everyone is discussing the same topic.</li> <li>• Make specific page/paragraph/topic references for each application (“for the Kansas app, at the bottom of page 5 ...”).</li> </ul>
<b>One Reviewer is especially quiet during a call</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directly engage the Reviewer by asking what he/she thinks about the point being discussed.</li> </ul>

**5.4.4 Providing Feedback on Individual Reviewer Form**

Two primary aspects of the Panel Coordinator’s role are to monitor Reviewers’ progress and to guide Reviewers to produce high-quality IRFs by the established deadlines. The IRFs document a Reviewer’s assessment of an application and serve as the foundation for the review results (provided to CNCS Staff and later to applicants as feedback). Often, there is a direct correlation between the quality of the IRFs and the roadblocks encountered in completing the remainder of the review process for the panel as a whole. As Reviewers begin completing their IRFs, Panel Coordinators review and provide constructive feedback on their IRFs.

A Panel Coordinator’s primary focus in reviewing and providing feedback on IRFs is to ensure that Reviewers:

- ◆ Include comments that reflect the *significant* strengths and weaknesses of an application.
- ◆ Only use comments that address the Selection Criteria.
- ◆ Select ratings that are supported by the significant strengths and weaknesses.
- ◆ Are consistent with the CNCS standards of quality and completion.

Panel Coordinators are expected to provide specific comments and constructive feedback to Reviewers on what improvements are needed. Panel Coordinators are responsible for ensuring the quality of the final IRFs and should perform quality assurance checks on all final products.

If a panel member is not completing his/her reviews as scheduled, Panel Coordinators should contact that Reviewer to understand what the problems are, and to ensure that he/she can get back on schedule. If this issue recurs, the GARP Liaison should be made aware of the efforts and the possible lack of compliance from that Reviewer. This proactive guidance will prevent major challenges for everyone (especially the panel) as the review advances.

Reviewers will complete the draft IRFs and email them to the Panel Coordinator. Read the draft IRF and provide feedback to the Reviewer via email—if needed, follow up by phone.

**Thank you for serving as a Review Participant in the 2014 justice AmeriCorps Blended Review!**