

# 2015 SOCIAL INNOVATION FUND

## *PANEL COORDINATOR SUPPLEMENT*

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

All Panel Coordinators are responsible for reading the 2015 Social Innovation Fund Expert Review Handbook and completing the required orientation sessions. It is also important to carefully read the Selection Criteria as laid out in the 2015 Social Innovation Fund (SIF) Notice of Federal Funding Availability (see the *Notice of Federal Funding Availability in **Appendix B: Links to Additional Reference Materials***). Understanding these criteria is critical to being able to provide guidance to your panel members and to ensure that the Selection Criteria are adequately considered and discussed in the expert review. To be an effective Panel Coordinator, you must be knowledgeable not only about the SIF review process, but also about the Review Participants' role and activities.

### **1.1 OVERVIEW OF THE PANEL COORDINATOR ROLE**

The Panel Coordinator plays a key role in the successful implementation of the external review, particularly with ensuring the timely delivery of quality review products to CNCS. Key aspects of the Panel Coordinator's role in the external 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 your panel with constructive and effective guidance in both the expert review process and the technical aspects of the review
- ◆ Ensuring Reviewers address the Selection Criteria in their IRWs and panel discussions adequately
- ◆ Providing timely and consistent feedback to Reviewers on the quality of their review forms
- ◆ Ensuring Reviewers receive and incorporate feedback if necessary from the POL on their review forms
- ◆ Ensuring Reviewers receive and incorporate feedback if necessary from the Editor on 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
- ◆ Completing the Panel Discussion Reports
- ◆ Reviewing the Applicant Feedback Summaries from each Reviewer

Carefully read the Panel Coordinator Participation Agreement specifying the expectations of the Panel Coordinator role. If you have 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.

### **1.2 PREPARING FOR THE 2015 SOCIAL INNOVATION FUND GRANT APPLICATION REVIEW**

#### **1.2.1 Panel Coordinator Timeline and Milestones**

The Expert Review process (excluding orientation sessions and other preliminary steps) spans 15 days. Panel Coordinators should utilize the *Timeline and Milestones* document to develop their own planning timeline for completing all of the Panel Coordinator Review Responsibilities. This document can be found on the CNCS Reviewer Resource Website and specifies the dates and tasks of the Expert Review and the key milestones specific to the Panel Coordinator role. A Reviewer schedule is also provided.



CNCS Reviewer Resource Website: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/SIFReviewerResourcePage>.

## 1.2.2 Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality

Even though you will not be evaluating the Social Innovation Fund applications, as Panel Coordinator you 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) on the Reviewer Resource Website.

As soon as the applications assigned to your panel are available in eGrants, access and examine each of your assigned applications for potential conflicts. If you suspect a conflict or have a question, 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 you with appropriate guidance. Complete and submit the COI Statement in advance of the start of the review.

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

*Note that this form should be completed whether you have or have not identified potential conflicts—as it represents your understanding of your responsibility regarding COIs, and Confidentiality, and your agreement to adhere to the guidelines in the instance that a COI circumstance arises.*

## 1.2.3 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 your panel assignments!** It is important to contact your assigned Reviewers and create the review schedule as early as you can. You will be assigned two panels: one with three Program Reviewers and one with three Evaluation Reviewers. Both panels will be reviewing the same applications. Once you have the contact information for the Reviewers on your panel, you should reach out to introduce yourself and initiate the planning process for the Panel Introduction Call and subsequent panel discussions. Suggested agenda topics for the Panel Introduction Call:

- ◆ Allow each Reviewer to give his/her background and level of experience with the review process
- ◆ Establish optimal means of communication for each Reviewer (e.g., preferred email address, phone number)
- ◆ Review the expectations and schedule, and work together 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 your panel assignment email, etc.)

## 1.3 SETTING UP YOUR 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 standard and expectations of CNCS, and you as a Panel Coordinator.
- ◆ Monitor and check in with panel members via email.
  - Send out updates of information and reminders of milestones to which the group agreed. (“Remember, by the end of today, everyone should have read their first three applications and written at least one Individual Reviewer Worksheet!”)
- ◆ As a group, create a realistic schedule for completion that attempts to consider everyone’s needs.
  - Remind the Reviewers to keep their Timetable handy, 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).

#### 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 you can help him/her get work done on time. Give heads up to your GARP Liaison.
- ◆ *Final action:* remind each Reviewer that you will need to notify your GARP Liaison if the work is not done satisfactorily and submitted by the deadline.

### **Ensuring that Individual Reviewer Worksheets are quality products**

#### Setting up for success:

- ◆ Create group agreements that include preparing thoughtful and thorough IRWs (Refer to the *Example IRW*).
- ◆ 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 for improvement for the IRW.
- ◆ *Request your GARP Liaison or Program Officer Liaison join a panel call to explain or clarify any misunderstandings.*

### **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, including 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 (day and evening hours)
- 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. (Don't wait for several days if a Reviewer is nonresponsive, let your GARP Liaison know right away.)

### **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 proposals.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ If you sense difficulties that might benefit from this assistance, offer to review them together, etc.
- ◆ Final step: Contact GARP Liaison to notify them of the issue.

### **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 your 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 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 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 conflict**

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.

**Note:** Your responsibility is to the panel as a whole. If one panel member’s needs are taking away from the panel as a whole, you need to seek help from CNCS Staff.

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.
- ◆ 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**

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 Review 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 your panel members both as a group and individually.
- ◆ Monitor their progress in writing their IRWs.
- ◆ Ask: “How can I assist you?”

Interventions:

- ◆ Set up a time to work individually with that panel member to get his/her reviews posted in eGrants or sent to you.



- ◆ Contact your GARP Liaison.
- ◆ Remember that your responsibility is to the panel as a whole. If one panel member's needs are taking away from the panel as a whole, you need to seek help from CNCS Staff. Do not hesitate to ask CNCS Staff for individualized support for the panel member.

## 1.4 COORDINATING YOUR PANEL

As the Panel Coordinator, you will monitor and guide the Reviewers to ensure engaging discussions and produce a summary document (the Panel Discussion Report) that reflects the panel's assessment of each assigned application. Both points of agreement and disagreement should be considered in the panel discussion.

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 IRWs to revise (if necessary) and finalize their assessments to reflect their final opinion.

The Panel Coordinator should take note of the discussion points and document the general considerations, including potential areas of concern, in the Panel Discussion Report for each application discussed.

The entire Expert Review will be 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 five people for a common goal
- ◆ Coordinating schedules of several people (including the Panel Coordinator) to performing review functions while also carrying on their lives (in different time zones)

### 1.4.1 Interacting with the Program Officer Liaison

The Program Officer Liaison is your resource for programmatic (SIF specific) inquiries. They will also review your Reviewer's IRWs that are completed after each Panel Discussion. The POL will only be reviewing for selection criteria interpretations. You can also expect that Program Officer Liaisons will have a brief conversation or check in with your panel before you enter the Panel Discussions to answer any questions that panelists may have about how to apply the Selection Criteria or about a concern identified in an application. You are encouraged to initiate or request a meeting with your POL (with your panel, or with you on your panel's behalf) if you are receiving multiple questions from the panelists about particular criteria, or the same application.

You can also expect that a POL may proactively check in with you during the actual review.

Be sure that all of your correspondence with your POL takes place through the [SIFApplication@cns.gov](mailto:SIFApplication@cns.gov) email address. **You must include your Panel# in the Subject line, and CC: your GARP Liaison.**

### 1.4.2 Interacting with the Editor

The Editor is your resource for well written comments. They will also review your Reviewer's IRWs that are completed after each Panel Discussion. The Editor will be reviewing for how well written and understandable your Reviewer's IRW comments are. The Editor will review and provide feedback on each IRW, but will only look at them once. You will be expected to work with your Reviewers to ensure



the IRWs have taken into account all of the feedback they receive. In the end, you will be approving the Reviewer’s IRWs as finished products.

Be sure that all of your correspondence with your Editor takes place through the [PeerReviewers@cns.gov](mailto:PeerReviewers@cns.gov) email address. **You must include your Panel# in the Subject line, and CC: your GARP Liaison.**

### 1.4.3 Facilitating the Panel Discussion

As the Panel Coordinator, your role is to help ensure that the panel discussions revolves around the Selection Criteria—utilize the IRW Sample document and the Reviewer Rubric as needed to keep panel members focused on the appropriate elements and weights. It is important to constructively communicate your observations and expectations, while encouraging your 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 an 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 diverse level of panel members’ expertise and backgrounds will lend 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 (see the *Panel Coordinator Tips* section for additional information on questions and guiding discussions):

- ◆ Utilize online scheduling tools (such as Doodle, Schedule Once, etc. according to your 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 assessment.
- ◆ 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. You will need to pay close attention to human dynamics and signals from your panel members to facilitate effectively, and be extra rigorous in ensuring that panel communications are clear and understood by all.

**Table 2: Panel Coordinator Challenges and Possible Solutions**

Challenge	Possible Solutions
Starting calls on time	<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>
Panel members speaking over each other	<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>



<p><b>Not having a visual that everyone can see (e.g., an evolving list of significant strengths and weaknesses for the application)</b></p>	<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>
<p><b>One Reviewer is especially quiet during a call</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directly engage the Reviewer by asking what he/she thinks about the point being discussed.</li> </ul>

### 1.4.4 Providing Feedback on Individual Reviewer Worksheet

Two primary aspects of the Panel Coordinator’s role are to monitor Reviewers’ progress and to guide Reviewers to produce high-quality IRWs by the established deadlines. The IRWs 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 IRWs and the roadblocks encountered in completing the remainder of the review process for the panel as a whole. As Reviewers begin completing their IRWs, you are asked to review and provide constructive feedback on their IRWs.

Your primary focus in reviewing and providing feedback on IRWs is to ensure that Reviewers:

- ◆ Include significant strengths and weaknesses that relate to the Selection Criteria.
- ◆ Select ratings that are supported by the significant strengths and weaknesses.
- ◆ Are consistent throughout the document.

As you edit the IRWs, expected to point out suggested edits to the Reviewers – (possibly using Track Changes). The most important task is to help Reviewers understand the IRW and what is expected in the level of quality. As a general rule, we expect that you will review each IRW once before the panel call. The Reviewer will apply your feedback to subsequent IRWs, and subsequent IRWs should require less-intensive feedback.

If a panel member is not completing his/her reviews as scheduled, you 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 IRWs and email them to the Panel Coordinator. Read the draft IRW and provide feedback to the Reviewer via email or phone. Second draft IRWs should be sent to the POL who will review them to ensure that the Selection Criteria is being applied correctly. After the POL review, send the IRWs to the Editor for their review. When you receive the edited IRWs back from the Editor, please make sure your Reviewers understand the feedback and incorporate that into their IRWs and future IRWs. If a Reviewer has extensive feedback on their IRW, you may want to go over it with them to ensure they understand what the expectations are for a quality review form.

### 1.4.5 Completing the Panel Discussion Report

The PDR serves to document the substance of a panel’s discussion for an application and your observations or concerns. The PDR should capture elements of the Selection Criteria that the panel members discussed, if there were major varying opinions, concerns that were noted outside of the Selection Criteria, or difficult areas of conversation on an aspect of the application. Because there will inevitably be varying opinions, ratings and assessments from the panel members, the PDR should offer an objective summary of the discussion. When presenting issues or hiccups that arose, be sure to provide information on how you or the panel responded/addressed the matter. Your personal perspectives or observations should be provided separately in the Observations from the Panel



Coordinator section. If there are discussion items that do not address Selection Criteria or are not appropriate for an IRW, you can include these on the PDR. This is sometimes a way to move a discussion point along, by letting Reviewers know that it has been noted on the PDR.

The PDR is available on the Reviewer Resource Webpage. Prepare a draft PDR for each application discussed and provide the draft to your GARP Liaison for their review and feedback. ANY correspondence with the GARP Liaison should occur through their direct email address, and you should **include your Panel # in the Subject Line**. Once a PDR is final, send it to your GARP Liaison.

**Thank you for being a Panel Coordinator in the  
2015 Social Innovation Fund Expert Review!**



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COMMUNITY  
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