Agricultural Marketing Services (AMS) Grant Review Reviewer Guide and Responsibilities

This document serves as a comprehensive guide for Reviewers participating in the AMS grant review process. It integrates both the specific responsibilities expected of a Reviewer and an overview of the remote review process. All Reviewers are expected to adhere to these instructions to ensure a transparent, objective, and timely review of the applications.

Pre-Review Responsibilities

Preparation and Familiarization

- **Study the Materials:**
    - Read the assigned Request for Applications (RFA) in its entirety, including all related materials.
    - Thoroughly review each application assigned to your panel.
    - Familiarize yourself with the reviewer instructions, guidance materials, and the ARM Training Manual.
- **Training Participation:**
    - Attend the mandatory Grant Review and ARM Training Webinar.
- **Administrative Completion:**
    - Complete, sign, and return the Work Agreement with your original signature as required.

Tasks During Review Period

- **Detailed Reviewer Responsibilities**
    - Complete the Reviewer Scoring Form in the Application Review Module (ARM) for every assigned application.
    - Write detailed and well-supported comments for every evaluation criterion. Responses should comprehensively address application strengths and areas for improvement. Short, one-line responses are not acceptable.
    - Complete the scoring form for each application in the ARM.
    - Promptly respond to communications from the Panel Chair.
    - Engage actively in all scheduled panel discussions. Collaboration during these discussions is crucial to developing a consensus around scores and comments.

Remote Review Process Overview

All panel members will use the online Application Review Module (ARM) system to access applications, record scores, and submit comments. Comprehensive training on using the ARM system will be provided during the orientation webinar.

- **Access:**
  - You will receive an email from "No_Reply@grantsolutions.gov" with your login credentials and instructions for accessing the ARM.
  - Returning users may enter their personalized ARM password; new users should create one by following the "forgot password" prompts if necessary.
  - If you do not receive the necessary email, please contact the support team at Reviews@grantsolutions immediately.
- **Panel Discussions:**
  - The Panel Chair will organize a "meet & greet" call with the panelists to initiate discussions and confirm the review schedule.
  - GrantSolutions will provide a dedicated video enabled conference call line for the duration of the review for each panel. Panels may use alternative communication tools to conduct panel discussions.
  - The schedule for these discussions will be set by the Panel Chair in consultation with all panel members.
  - Panel discussions are critical for ensuring consensus on application scores and comments; please remain flexible and responsive to scheduling needs.

Key Recommendations and Best Practices

- **Thorough Preparation:**
  - Preparation before the Reading Days is crucial—Reviewers should are fully versed in the RFA materials, all application contents, and the ARM process.
- **Communication and Flexibility:**
  - Regular communication among panel members and with the ARM GrantSolutions Review Staff is key to a successful review.
  - Remain flexible in scheduling to accommodate all panel members and ensure all reviews are thoroughly completed.
- **Quality over Consensus:**
  - Your goal is to reflect an accurate consolidation of varied expert perspectives. While consensus is desirable, it is essential that the summary captures both majority opinions and legitimate dissenting views.
  - The individual scores by panelists for each evaluation criterion must fall within a 10-point range to ensure consistency and alignment in the review process.
- **Time Management:**
  - Adhere to the established timeline. Punctuality in conducting reviews and submitting reports ensures the integrity and efficiency of the overall process.