

Agricultural Marketing Services (AMS) Grant Review Panel Chair Guide and Responsibilities

This document serves as a comprehensive guide for Panel Chairs participating in the AMS grant review process. It integrates both the specific responsibilities expected of a Panel Chair and the and scheduling guidelines necessary for efficiently managing the review process. All Panel Chairs 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.
 - Ensure that all panelists are clear about expectations and requirements.

Coordination and Planning

- **Schedule Coordination:**
 - Set, coordinate, and monitor an overall work schedule for your panel.
 - Communicate with the ARM GrantSolutions Team if there are difficulties with panel member availability, conference call scheduling, or conflicts of interest.
 - Contact your Federal Review Director (RD) if there are any concerns regarding the Announcement/Criteria or process.
- **Meet & Greet:**
 - Following the initial webinar, schedule a “meet & greet” call with all panelists via phone or email to confirm the review process and discussion schedule.
 - Share your and the panelists’ contact information to facilitate smooth communication.

Timeline and Scheduling

Immediate Post-Training

- **Panel Introduction:**
 - 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.
- **Schedule Outline:**
 - Schedule the panel discussion calls to accommodate the submission dates for the comments and scores for assigned applications. Ensure that the scheduled calls allow the full participation of panel members.
 - Plan to allocate approximately two hours of discussion for each application review.
 - Confirm that panel discussions will take place during business hours and remain flexible to maximize participation.

Review Period

- **Application Access and Review:**
 - 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.gov immediately.
- **Ongoing Communication:**
 - Keep in close touch with the ARM GrantSolutions Review Staff via USDAReview@grantreview.org regarding any scheduling or application concerns.
 - Use the established schedule to conduct panel conference calls and ensure the flow of communication and review.
- **Responsibility for Evaluations:**
 - Monitor the submission of detailed written comments and score entries by all panelists.
 - Remind reviewers to review and, if necessary, update their scores and comments post-panel discussions.

Tasks During the Review Period

Role as Panel Chair

- **Facilitation:**
 - Objectively lead and moderate panel review discussions.
 - Ensure that all panel members have the opportunity to contribute.
 - Manage the pace and timeline of the panel discussions.
- **Evaluation Oversight:**
 - Compile and edit the written comments for the final Panel Summary Report directly in ARM.
 - The final written report should reflect consolidated evaluative comments that are thorough and aligned with the scores provided. One-line comments are not acceptable.
 - Ensure that all criterion responses are fully supported by reviewer comments.
- **Ongoing Monitoring:**
 - Confirm that all panelists submit complete evaluative comments and scores in a timely manner.
 - Be proactive in addressing any issues such as incomplete reviews or problematic feedback, contacting the ARM GrantSolutions Team or the Federal RD as needed.

Role as a Reviewer

- **Role:**
 - Read all applications and supporting materials.
 - Write comprehensive and concise evaluative comments for each criterion.
 - Provide scores for every application assigned to your panel.
 - Participate actively in all panel discussions.
- **Responsibilities:**
 - Prior to the training webinar, review the Request for Application (RFA), all related materials, and the ARM Training Manual.
 - Complete the Reviewer Scoring Form in the Application Review Module (ARM) for every assigned application.
 - Ensure that all comments are thorough, support the scoring decisions, and reflect the full scope of each criterion. Short, one-line responses are not acceptable.
 - Maintain full participation in scheduled panel discussions and promptly respond to communications from the Panel Chair.
 - Notify the ARM GrantSolutions Review staff at USDAReview@grantreview.org if you encounter any challenges or conflicts of interest or if you experience any issues coordinating with your panel.

Post-Review Requirements

After the review period has concluded, you will need to:

- **Close-Out Procedures:**

- Monitor your email for the “Close-Out” notification confirming panel completion.
- Complete, sign, and return all required forms and documentation in accordance with the “Close-Out” instructions.
- **Finalization of the Panel Summary Report:**
 - Ensure that any final comments or score adjustments from reviewers are addressed in the final Summary Report.
 - Work closely with the Federal RD to confirm that all evaluator comments and scores are accurate and complete in the ARM system.

Key Recommendations and Best Practices

- **Thorough Preparation:**
 - Preparation before the Reading Days is crucial—ensure that you and your panel 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.
 - To ensure consistency and alignment in the review process, individual panelists scores for an application must fall within a 10-point range of other panel members’ scores for the same application.
- **Time Management:**
 - Adhere to the established timeline. Punctuality in conducting reviews and submitting reports ensures the integrity and efficiency of the overall process.