



June 23, 2023

Noni Byrnes, PhD
Director
National Institutes of Health
Center for Scientific Review
6701 Rockledge Drive MSC 7768
Bethesda, MD 20892-7768

RE: Request for Information (RFI) on Recommendations for Improving Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award (NRSA) Fellowship Review

Dear Director Byrnes:

The Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science (CANS) and the American Academy of Nursing (Academy) appreciate the opportunity to offer comments regarding the Center for Scientific Review's (CSR) proposed changes to the peer review process for the Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award (NRSA) fellowship applications. As the scientific voice for the Academy, CANS formulates and advances research, scientific training, and career development within the profession. In the effort to promote better health, CANS enhances communication among nurse scientists and the public to develop, disseminate, and utilize nursing research. The Academy serves the public by advancing health policy through the generation, synthesis, and dissemination of nursing knowledge. Academy Fellows are inducted into the organization for their extraordinary contributions to improving health locally and globally. With more than 2,900 Fellows, the Academy represents nursing's most accomplished leaders in policy, research, administration, practice, and academia. The vision of the Academy is *healthy lives for all people*. To achieve this vision, the Academy's mission is to improve health and achieve health equity by influencing policy through nursing leadership, innovation, and science.

Overall, CANS and the Academy support CSR's revisions to the NRSA fellowship applications. We commend CSR for revising and streamlining the review process to ensure greater focus on the review criteria that drive the overall impact score. Specifically, we support scoring all three criteria on the 1-9 scale and appreciate efforts to reduce application review time with simplified review criteria. CANS and the Academy offer the following comments and recommendations for CSR to consider during finalization of the NRSA application review criteria and supplemental forms. We do recognize that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) will need to provide reviewer guidance on CSR's proposed changes. Our brief comments are outlined below and grouped by the two areas of recommended revisions.

Recommendation 1: Revise the Criteria Used to Evaluate NRSA Fellowship Applications

CANS and the Academy support the application change from the previous five criteria to the proposed three criteria and encourage CSR to consider that these proposed changes will require additional training for applicants, sponsors, and reviewers. We have identified areas that may need additional clarification and are described below:

- *Recommendations for Improving NRSA Fellowship Review* document: It should be noted that there are no changes proposed to the research plan section that is currently completed by the applicant and that this section will continue to be completed by the applicant in the document. Without this clarification, there could be confusion as to who should complete this section.
- **Sponsorship Criteria:** The mentorship team, which would also include the sponsor of the applicant, is evaluated under review criterion number two. Evaluation of the sponsor is also mentioned in review criterion number three. We recommend CSR clarify under which criterion the sponsor should be evaluated to avoid duplication.

Recommendation 2: Revise the PHS Fellowship Supplemental Form

CANS and the Academy support CSR's efforts to decrease the length of the sections written by the student and sponsor as well as clarifying what should be included in these sections of the application. We have identified three areas where we recommend CSR provide further clarification including:

- **Fellowship Supplement:** Currently, the Fellowship Supplement includes the following sections: Fellowship Applicant; Research Training Plan; Sponsor(s), Collaborator(s), and Consultant(s); and Institutional Environment and Commitment to Training. Based on the changes, CSR is only proposing changes to the Fellowship Applicant and Sponsor/Collaborator/Consultant sections. It appears that there will still be separate sections on the Research Training Plan and the Institutional Environment and Commitment to Training. We encourage CSR to clarify if these separate sections will also be included or will they be deleted.
- **Organization of the Application Sections:** Organizing the application sections in the order reviewers evaluate them will support CSR's goal to streamline the review process. We recommend CSR organize the sections of the application to match the Review Criteria.
- **Description of Activities During Award Period:** In the "Sponsor & Co-Sponsor Section A. Training Plan, Environment and Research Facilities" section, the sponsors are asked to describe classes, seminars, opportunities for interaction with other scientists and any professional skills development opportunities. The applicant is also asked to describe the same information in the section entitled "*Detailed Account of Activities Planned Under this Award.*" Specifically, the applicant is asked to describe, by year, the activities (research, coursework, professional development, clinical activities, etc.) they will be involved in during the proposed award period. The application is also asked to provide this information in a section entitled "Research Training Plan." CANS and the Academy are concerned that requesting the same information for the training plan from both the applicant and the sponsor is duplicative. It would be more efficient if the sponsor and the applicant collaboratively drafted the training plan, and we recommend CSR consider requesting one training plan. The applicant section and sponsor sections appear to have been shortened by approximately one page each when word limits are considered, which is helpful, but reducing duplication of the training plan would shorten the application further. We encourage CSR to eliminate this duplication in the application.

CANS and the Academy thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on CSR's Recommendations for Improving Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award (NRSA) Fellowship Review. We commend the efforts to improve the review process. If we can be of any assistance to you or your staff, please do not hesitate to contact the Academy's Senior Director of Policy, Christine Murphy, at cmurphy@aannet.org or 202-777-1174.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Rawl, PhD, RN, FAAHB, FAAN
Chair
CANS National Advisory Committee



Kenneth R. White, PhD, AGACNP, ACHPN, FACHE, FAAN
President
American Academy of Nursing

References

Byrnes, N. (2023, April 25). *CSR Review Matters Blog*.

<https://www.csr.nih.gov/reviewmatters/2023/04/25/update-on-improving-fellowship-review-a-request-for-information/>

Recommendation for Improving NRSA Fellowship Review –Proposed Reviewer Guidance and Application Instructions | grants.nih.gov. (n.d.). <https://grants.nih.gov/policy/peer/improving-nrsa-fellowship/reviewer-instructions>