



COUNCIL FOR THE
ADVANCEMENT OF
NURSING SCIENCE

March 23, 2022

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

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) draft strategic plan for 2022-2027. 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, including health promotion, prevention, managing acute and chronic conditions, and care at the end of life. 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 2,800 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 actualize this vision, the Academy's mission is to improve health and achieve health equity by influencing policy through nursing leadership, innovation, and science. We applaud CSR for including key initiatives of the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) UNITE initiative as well as taking steps to ensure the research review process is transparent, open, and fair. Overall, CANS and the Academy strongly supports the CSR's draft strategic plan. We offer the following recommendations for CSR to consider during the finalization process.

Specifically, we encourage CSR to continue to strive for diversity within the cadre of reviewers, and to include discipline diversity in the review process. In reviewing the current list of standing members on many of the relevant scientific review groups, we note few nurse scientists. In addition, we note the opportunity to have nurse scientists be represented on the CSR Advisory Council. We are concerned by the lack of nurse scientists in the review process and see this as an ideal time to ensure that diversity of scientific lenses is represented. We encourage CRS to ensure scientists from nursing and other relevant disciplines are thoughtfully integrated into all aspects of CRS's work. Our brief comments are outlined below and grouped by the strategic plan's individual goals.

Goal 1 - Maintain scientific review groups that provide appropriate scientific coverage and review settings for all of NIH science

We applaud the Center's commitment to transparency and diversity as highlighted not only in this goal, but throughout the plan. Improvement of the review process is a welcome step and we are pleased to see this as a priority in the strategic plan. In Objective 1.1 of the first goal, the strategic plan discusses

the Evaluating Panel Quality in Review (ENQUIRE) which would review approximately 20 percent of the review groups each year. We support CSR's commitment to ensuring every review group is evaluated at least once every 5 years. With 175 review groups as outlined in the plan, we find this a reasonable and achievable goal.

Goal 2 - Further develop a large cadre of diverse, well-trained, and scientifically qualified experts to serve as reviewers

First, we are extremely supportive of the scientific review groups being diverse on multiple dimensions, including increasing the number of women, minorities, and underrepresented minorities identified as potential reviewers. We know that having a diverse biomedical workforce is essential to conducting research that considers cultural differences. As noted above, we also encourage the scientific review groups to expand the diversity of disciplines in the scientific review groups. Ensuring that the review process has a diverse set of reviewers, which includes nurse scientists and other disciplines, is also essential to further research and ultimately achieving health equity.

As CSR implements goal two of the strategic plan, CANS and the Academy encourages the Center to consider the balance of experience of the reviewers in each review group. CANS membership is comprised of nurse scientists, who know that reviewing research for the NIH is a vastly different process from reviewing research conducted at other organizations and institutions. We recommend that CSR incorporate more training for initial reviewers including the addition of a mentoring system. It is our experience that initial reviewers may not have complete understanding of the full extent of the review process at NIH. The review process would only benefit and become stronger with the implementation of this training and mentor program for initial reviewers.

We are supportive of the Early Career Reviewer (ECR) Program and have encouraged our emerging nurse scientists to apply to this program. We also support CSR's targeted outreach to the scientific community (including scientific societies, academic institutions, NIH, and other federal agencies) to identify a broader range of potential reviewers. We have initiated a process for nurse scientists who are members of CANS to submit their materials to our Science Committee for review and will be recommending those deemed appropriate to CSR.

Goal 3 - Further develop an outstanding, engaged, and diverse staff

CANS and the Academy are supportive of the objectives outlined in goal three of the strategic plan to diversify, expand, and train the staff at the Center. The key to any successful research program is not only the reviewers themselves, but also having strong staff. Implementation of this goal will go a long way to strengthening the overall review process.

Goal 4 - Implement changes to the peer review process to make it more fair, effective, and efficient

CANS and the Academy have incorporated actions to decrease bias in our internal processes and therefore support CSR's commitment to decrease bias in the review process. Additionally, we agree that it is time for another iteration of how to conduct a review and are supportive of an ongoing review of the review process as outlined in the strategic plan. We are also supportive of decreasing the administrative elements of the review process for the reviewers and recommend that the support staff take on these elements to make the process more efficient. CANS and the Academy also applaud the increased use of technology in the review process as well as continuing bias training.

Goal 5 - Achieve our mission through transparency, engagement with the scientific community, and a data-driven approach to decision-making

We commend CSR's commitment to transparency, interacting with organizations, as well as incorporating a data-driven approach in the review process. CANS and the Academy agree with the Center that the development of outreach approaches are appropriate. We applaud the Center's intention to also ensure diversity is added to this goal.

CANS and the Academy thank you for the opportunity to provide comments to CSR's draft strategic plan for 2022-2027. We applaud your efforts to improve the review process and encourage the Center to continue strive for transparency as well as discipline diversity in the final plan. 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



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