

3. The Peer Review Process: The Details Sequence of Events

Preliminary Planning (4 months)

The preliminary planning phase consists of 1) OSQR's preparation for a panel, 2) creating the list of projects to be peer reviewed, meaning all ARS research projects coded greater than 50% to the subject National Program, 3) OSQR's orientation to National Program Teams, 4) National Program Team's determining those projects that must be postponed or exempted, 5) drafting prospectuses, and 6) outlining the project plan.

OSQR prepares for each panel by planning panel meetings, orientations, and payments. The early planning process is based on an assumption that each panel will have about 20 projects to review, +/- 5 projects and the panelist to project ratio is 1:6. Small National Programs, particularly those with less than 10 projects in the Program, are questioned regarding the number of vacancies among the key research team members, potential for adding projects from similar National Programs with similar objectives, and the number of ad hoc reviewers that may be mandatory to make up for a small panel. OSQR also analyzes the status of the the database records of peer reviewers by expertise, for number of entries, how recent entries were made, and diversity. Several approaches are available to make the pool efficient, however the primary mode of improving a pool of potential peer reviewers is to request that ARS scientists and managers make nominations during the subject peer review session.

OSQR gives each National Program Team (NPT) an orientation to officially start the Process. Acting and new National Program Leaders also receive a briefing upon their arrival. The orientation is meant to address procedures for NPTs who may not have previously participated in the Peer Review Process and to announce the start of each review session.

The National Program Teams review the research assignments each project has been given related to its National Program Action Plan. The NPT often prescribes a set of objectives and approach for the research. In other cases, the NPT may merely request to review a working draft of the prospectus and provide feedback. This coordination between the research unit and the NPT is established early on via a "direction memo," transmitted with OSQR's Peer Review Process directions. The information provided includes:

- a list of steps and deadlines for the specific peer review session
- the OSQR Website, which provides other information such as directions for writing prospectuses and project plans, writing tips, examples, frequently asked questions, and resources from the National Agricultural Library
- instruction to read the criteria the peer reviewers will use
- instruction to suggest peer reviewers
- encouragement to obtain project plan-writing training and/or attend seminars for scientific report and proposal writing
- contact information

**Comments
for Section 3
Preliminary Planning**