

Peer Review Panel Meeting (6 weeks)

Individual research project plans are reviewed for quality and programmatic relevance as a group, according to their common primary National Program (coded greater than 50%). This allows for thematically related projects in otherwise diverse laboratories and geographic locations to be developed, peer reviewed, and then implemented in a more collaborative and synchronized fashion. The panels are organized to review the research project plans of a National Program for a one-time peer review session and are then dissolved.

OSQR plans and conducts peer review sessions for projects in each National Program on a five-year cycle. About five National Programs, encompassing 200-250 research project plans, are the subject of peer review sessions each year. (See the Panel Peer Review Schedule on the following page.) National Programs encompassing more than 25 projects are divided into more than one panel peer review to address thematically or discipline-related projects within the Program.

National Program	Panel Convenes
<i>Year 2001</i>	
Animal Health (NP 103)	May 2001
Water Quality & Management (NP 201)	August 2001
Food Safety (1 of 4 Panels)	December 2001
Air Quality (NP 203)	December 2001
<i>Year 2002</i>	
Food Animal Production Systems (NP 101)	March 2002
Animal Well-Being & Stress Control Systems (NP 105)	May 2002
Rangeland, Pasture & Forages (NP 205)	May 2002
Plant Diseases (NP 303)	August 2002
Methyl Bromide Alternatives (NP 308)	August 2002
Plant Microbial/Insect Germplasm Conservation/Development (NP 301)	December 2002
<i>Year 2003</i>	
Crop Production (NP 305)	May 2003
Integrated Farming Systems (NP 207)	May 2003
Human Nutrition (NP 107)	August 2003
Quality and Utilization of New Products (NP 306)	December 2003
<i>Year 2004</i>	
Arthropod Pests of Animals and Humans (NP 104)	May 2004
Bioenergy & Energy Alternatives (NP 307)	May 2004
Aquaculture (NP 106)	August 2004
Global Change (NP 204)	August 2004
Crop Protection & Quarantine (NP 304)	December 2004
Manure and Byproduct Utilization (NP 206)	December 2004
<i>Year 2005</i>	
Food Safety (NP 108)	August 2005
Soil Resource Management (NP 202)	December 2005
Plant Biology & Molecular Processes (NP 302)	December 2005

Panels receive an orientation from the Office of Scientific Quality and the National Program Staff. The National Program Leader or a member of their team must discuss the nature and relationships between all of the research projects coded or related to the National Program. The panelists are encouraged to review the National Program's Action Plan and National Program Overview before the meeting.

Each panelist reviews approximately 24 research project plans over a 5-week period and then convenes in Beltsville, MD to thoroughly discuss each project. While each panelist evaluates every plan, they are also assigned by the panel chair as primary reviewer of an average of three plans and secondary reviewer for three plans. (See Glossary for a definition of primary reviewer and secondary reviewer.) Panelists individually

- evaluate each project plan for scientific and technical quality based on criteria established by ARS,
- provide recommendations on how to improve each project plan, and
- assign an action class for the level of needed improvement to each project plan.

A typical panel consists of 8 peer reviewers plus one panel chair. An ad hoc reviewer may be sought if special expertise is needed for one or more of the projects. Prior to the panel session, each reviewer reads every research project plan and provides written comments. Primary and secondary reviewers provide in-depth comments, whereas other reviewers may simply make bulleted statements or identify questions in preparation for the discussions. Primary and secondary reviewers come prepared to lead the discussion of the projects they have been assigned. If an ad hoc reviewer was needed on a project, the appropriate primary reviewer presents the ad hoc reviewers comments. After each plan is discussed, each panelist documents his/her judgment about the degree of modification needed by assigning an action class (See Exhibit 6: Action Class Matrix.) on a form provided at the panel meeting. (See Exhibit 9: Peer Reviewer Guidelines also.) Panels devote approximately one hour per plan over a 3-day period.

The panel discusses the strengths and weaknesses of each project plan and contributes to the final recommendations. Review criteria, asked in their question format, guide the discussion. (See Exhibit 3: Sample Peer Review Form.) The panel recommendations include a summary of salient points made by panelists during the discussion and a rationale for their recommendations. Primary reviewers compose a review that captures salient comments of the panel, as well as recommendations to which a response should be given. This review is submitted to the panel chair for validation by the last day of the meeting. OSQR distributes the action classes and recommendations to the Area Directors.

[Policy for Observing Peer Review Panels](#)

Persons interested in observing peer review panels must provide adequate justification for needing to observe panels, whereby that need cannot be otherwise met through the Manual or discussions with OSQR staff. Requirements for confidentiality and lack of conflict of interests must be met.

**Comments
for Section 6
Peer Review Panel Meeting**