K-Club

Cracking the Code

How the NIH's Simplified Review Framework Affects Your Grant Applications

12/8/2025

Survey Drawing

Survey Drawing

November Winner: Josiah Takang

K-Club Special:
Early Career Researcher Conference 2026

- Undergraduates, graduate students, medical students, residents, medical fellows, postdoctoral research fellows, and junior faculty (assistant professor or below) conducting child health research are all encouraged to submit abstracts as lead authors.
- Submissions from residents, fellows, postdocs, and junior faculty may be invited for short (10-minute) oral presentations.
- All abstracts will be considered for oral rapid-fire (3-minute) talks and poster sessions.
- Encore abstracts (those previously prepared or presented elsewhere) are welcome.
- Because space is limited, we may cap the number of accepted abstracts this year.
- Each abstract must include the following sections: Background, Methods, Results, and Conclusions. The total length must not exceed 350 words.

Deadline: January 9, 2026 5pm

More Information Here

K-Club Special: Georgia CTSA KL2

- The goal of the Georgia CTSA KL2 Program is to support and enhance career development for junior faculty (MD, PhD, MD/PhD, or PharmD) interested in a career that encompasses clinical and translational science (CTS) and clinical and translational research (CTR).

- Salary support to enable them to spend at least 75% of their professional time (50% is allowed for trainees from surgery or surgical subspecialties) on clinical and translational research (CTR)/clinical and translational science (CTS) and research training and $25,000 per year for research-related expenses and tuition for the Master of Science in Clinical Research (MSCR) degree, Certificate Program in Translational Science (CPTS), or a menu of selected courses.

- Support in the Georgia CTSA KL2 Program will be provided for up to two years. The Georgia CTSA KL2 Program also provides opportunities for leadership training, mentor training, Team Science training, and Scientific Communications training.

Deadline: February 2, 2026 5 PM

More Information Here

K-Club Special: University Research Committee (URC) 2026-27 Cycle

- The URC supports:
  - Early career faculty on their path toward research independence
  - More advanced faculty who wish to engage novel questions that enhance their expertise
  - Teams of faculty who seek to transcend the boundaries of their respective disciplines and undertake transformative research
- Categories of Support Proposals for the following six (6) URC categories are sought: 1. Arts: Visual and Performing 2. Biological and Health Sciences 3. Humanities 4. Interdisciplinary 5. Mathematics and Natural Sciences 6. Social Sciences
- Award maximums are $30,000 and most URC awards are single PI projects. Interdisciplinary proposals are the singular exception to this award ceiling, with awards up to $40,000 possible.

Deadline: January 17, 2026 11 pm

More Information Here

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Esteemed Panelists

Shannon Gourley, PhD

Professor,
Director of Graduate Studies,
Neuroscience Program,
Departments of Pediatrics and
Psychiatry,
Emory University,
Children's Healthcare of Atlanta,
Emory National Primate,
Research Center

Sasha Key, PhD

Professor,
Marcus Autism Center
Department of Pediatrics,
Emory University

Sarah Shultz, PhD

Associate Professor,
Department of Pediatrics,
Emory University,
Director,
Pediatric Neuroimaging
Research Core,
Marcus Autism Center

Panelist Self Introduction & Overall Review Experience Overview

Please provide a brief background of your research, and your grant review experience for NIH and otherwise.

Include:

- Type of grants you have reviewed for NIH
- # times you have reviewed before and after “simplified review framework” took effect

Simplified Review Framework for NIH Research Project Grant Applications

When did this happen?

- Initially announced in October 2023 (via NOT-OD-24-010)
- Commenced with Research Project Grant applications submitted in Jan 2025

This notice announces a new framework for the peer review of most research project grant (RPG) applications* beginning with submissions for due dates on or after January 25, 2025. The simplified review framework is expected to better focus peer reviewers on the key questions needed to assess the scientific and technical merit of proposed research projects: *"Should the proposed research project be conducted?" "Can the proposed research project be conducted?"*

*The Simplified Framework for NIH Peer Review will be effective for receipt deadlines on or after January 25, 2025 for the grants and cooperative agreements with the following RPG activity codes: DP1, DP2, DP3, DP4, DP5, R01, R03, R15, R16, R21, R33, R34, R36, R61, RC1, RC2, RC4, RF1, RL1, RL2, U01, U34, U3R, UA5, UC1, UC2, UC4, UF1, UG3, UH2, UH3, UH5

Five Criteria Reorganized into Three Factors

The Simplified Framework for NIH Peer Review initiative reorganizes the five regulatory criteria (Significance, Investigators, Innovation, Approach, Environment; 42 C.F.R. Part 52h.8) into three factors – two will receive numerical criterion scores and one will be evaluated for sufficiency. All three factors will be considered in arriving at the overall impact score.

← scored 1-9

← scored 1-9

← Binary rating: Appropriate OR Additional expertise/resources needed

Three R01 Review Criteria (two of which are scored)

The reframing of the criteria serves to focus reviewers on three central questions reviewers should be evaluating:

Factor 1: Importance of the research

Should it be done?

Factor 2: Rigor and feasibility

Can it be done well?

Factor 3: Expertise and resources

Are the expertise and resources in place to do it?

Overall bottom line: *What is the likelihood for the project to exert a sustained, powerful influence on the research field(s) involved?*

Research Plan: Factor 1 (Should it be done?)

Scored criterion

Significance:

- Does the proposal address current scientific challenges and opportunities?
- Is there sufficient rationale for undertaking the study?
- Is the scientific background for the work (e.g., prior literature and/or preliminary data) rigorous, and does it justify the proposed study?

Innovation:

- What is the extent to which innovation influences the importance of undertaking the proposed research? *(Note that a project that is not applying novel concepts or approaches may be of critical importance for the field.)*
- Does the proposed work apply novel concepts, methods or technologies or uses existing concepts, methods, technologies in novel ways, to enhance the overall impact of the project?

This is now critical. The overall score cannot be better than the score for Factor 1

Research Plan: Factor 2 (Can it be done well?)

Scored criterion

Rigor:

- Does the application have the potential to produce unbiased, reproducible, robust data?
- Is the experimental design rigorous with appropriate controls?
- Is the sample size is sufficient and well-justified?
- Are the plans for analysis, interpretation, and reporting of results of high quality?
- Have the investigators presented adequate plans to address relevant biological variables, such as sex or age?

Feasibility:

- Is the proposed approach sound and achievable, and does it include plans to address problems or new challenges that emerge in the work?
- Is the plan to recruit and retain a diverse population of participants adequate and feasible? Can the proposed enrollment be achieved?
- Are the study timeline and milestones feasible?

Research Plan: Factor 3 (Are the expertise and resources in place to do it?)

Rated but not scored

Investigators:

- Have the investigator(s) demonstrated background, training, and expertise, as appropriate for their career stage, to conduct the proposed work?
- For Multiple Principal Investigator (MPI) applications, does the leadership plan facilitate coordination and collaboration?

Environment:

- Are the institutional resources appropriate to ensure the successful execution of the proposed work.?

This is now judged in a drop-down menu: appropriate (no explanation) or additional expertise and resources needed (explanation required)

Panelist Experiences: Training and implementation for new review framework

Describe the training from the NIH for the new Simplified Review Framework.

Was the study section able to easily adopt the new approach? How did it play out in real time?

Five Criteria Reorganized into Three

- **Factor 1: Importance of the Research** (*Significance, Innovation*), scored 1-9
- **Factor 2: Rigor and Feasibility** (*Approach*), scored 1-9
- **Factor 3: Expertise and Resources** to be evaluated with a selection from a drop-down menu
  - Appropriate (no written explanation needed)
  - Identify need for additional expertise and/or resources (requires reviewer to briefly address specific gaps in expertise or resources needed to carry out the project)
  - The change to having peer reviewers assess the adequacy of investigator expertise and institutional resources as a binary choice is designed to have reviewers evaluate investigator and environment with respect to the work proposed. It is intended to reduce the potential for general scientific reputation to have an undue influence.

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Impact Scoring

The Simplified Framework for NIH Peer Review initiative reorganizes the five regulatory criteria (Significance, Investigators, Innovation, Approach, Environment; 42 C.F.R. Part 52h.8) into three factors – two will receive numerical criterion scores and one will be evaluated for sufficiency. **All three factors will be considered in arriving at the overall impact score.**

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Panelist Perspective: Scoring

How many scores do you enter into your actual review before the study section meets?

How do your individual factor scores plus the third factor weigh into your final impact score?

Panelist Perspective: Scoring Factor 1 (Importance)

Do you recommend applicants put more emphasis on highlighting significance and innovation now that this is a score-driving category?

Is it important to frame significance and innovation to be compelling for a broader scientific audience, not just specialists?

Panelist Perspective: Scoring Factor 2 (Rigor & Feasibility)

How is this different or the same from the section formerly named “Approach?”

How much weight does Factor 2 now carry compared to significance (Factor 1)?

Panelist Perspective:
Scoring Factor 3 (Expertise & Resources)

What exactly constitutes "sufficient" vs. "additional expertise/resources needed"?

How does this binary rating influence the final impact score and what level of investigator experience and institutional support meets the standard?

Panelist Perspective: Study Section Discussion

How has the study section discussion changed since the simplified framework has been introduced?

In what ways have the study section discussion stayed the same?

Panelist Perspective: Influence on Grant Writing

How has participating in CSR grant review influenced your own grant writing?

Did you adjust your own established grant writing “best practices” after participating in review using the new framework?

Simplified Review Framework for NIH Research Project Grant Applications

Since this is K-Club, we would be remiss if we did not mention that K Grants are not included in this list!

The Simplified Framework for NIH Peer Review will be effective for receipt deadlines on or after January 25, 2025 for the grants and cooperative agreements with the following RPG activity codes: DP1, DP2, DP3, DP4, DP5, R01, R03, R15, R16, R21, R33, R34, R36, R61, RC1, RC2, RC4, RF1, RL1, RL2, U01, U34, U3R, UA5, UC1, UC2, UC4, UF1, UG3, UH2, UH3, UH5

K Grant Review Criteria

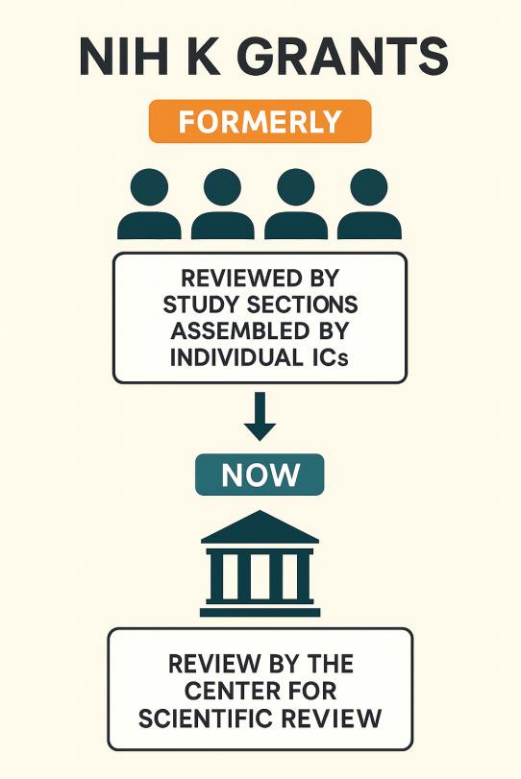
Review Criteria for NIH K awards remain unchanged
All sections are scored and help inform the overall impact score

- Candidate
- Career Dev Plan, Career Goals & Objectives
- Research plan
- Mentors and mentoring plan
- Environment & Institutional Commitment

Details can be found at the bottom of each Notice of Funding Announcement (NOFO)

What HAS CHANGED with K Grant Review

- March 6, 2025: “NIH centralizes peer review to improve efficiency and strengthen integrity”
- The review of K grant applications moved from institute-specific to a centralized first-level review by the Center for Scientific Review (CSR)'s study sections for scientific merit



Panelist Perspective:
K grant review since the change to CSR

Since Ks are no longer reviewed at the institute level, can you describe how they are now reviewed?

Is there a demarcation in K vs R review with a noticeable shift in the intention of the review discussion?

Panelist Experiences: K Grant Scoring

Even though K grants are still reviewed and scored using the existing framework (i.e. not the simplified framework) does the new framework influence K application review in any way?

Do you have any advice for K applicants/awardees for if the Research Plan of their R applications should be written differently in light of the emphasis on research importance?

Panelist Experiences: Final Thoughts

What is the most important thing you hope K-Clubbers remember from today K-Club?

Begin with the end in mind