

## **MMC Scientific Review Committee Policies and Procedures:** Revised June 2016

The MMC Scientific Review Committee (SRC) was established in February 2011. This document describes current methods of committee administration that have evolved since that time.

The chairman and members of the SRC are appointed by the Director of the Maine Medical Center Research Institute. The original intent was that they would serve staggered terms of 2-4 years so that a core of experienced members remains, but with some members (including the chairman) periodically replaced by new members. Over time, it would thereby be expected that a growing number of former members in our scientific community will be able to affirm the integrity of the review processes.

When a proposal is referred to the SRC, the chairman selects two (or possibly more) principal reviewers to prepare written reports. At least one of these reviewers is a regular member of the SRC. Other persons with special expertise (usually but not necessarily from the MMC staff) may also be selected as *ad hoc* reviewers. In a small scientific community it is inevitable that reviewers often have some professional relationship with the investigator. However, if any personal or professional relationship makes it difficult to evaluate the proposal objectively, the reviewer is expected to acknowledge this and be excused. The identity of the principal reviewers for each proposal is kept confidential within the Committee.

The written reports follow (in most cases) a standard format developed in consultation with the IRB, including a summary score from 1 to 9 following NIH criteria. These reports are sent to the chairman when complete, but are not circulated electronically to the full Committee. After both principal reviewers have independently submitted their reports, the chairman sends each of them the other report in advance of the scheduled meeting. Other committee members may submit written comments or scores, especially if they cannot attend the discussion in person.

All members of the Committee receive the proposals at least ten days prior to a scheduled meeting. At the meeting, the written reports are distributed and presented by the principal reviewers (or by the chairman if the reviewer is absent). After discussion, the principal reviewers declare their scores using a whole number from 1 to 9 (possibly revised as a result of the discussion; if a principal reviewer is not present, the chairman may revise their score based on a judgment about what they would have done). Other committee members who are present then vote, but must state a reason if their scores are outside the range declared by the principal reviewers. An average score is calculated and recorded. The chairman does not vote.

Over the past four years, the median average score for a first-time submission to the MMC SRC has been between 6 (“Satisfactory, some strengths but also some moderate

weaknesses”) and 7 (“Fair, some strengths but at least one major weakness”). There has been no significant difference in the average scores for mentored grant applications when compared to other applications.

The chairman prepares a short summary of the written reviews and discussion for each proposal, including the average score. This summary and the original anonymous written reviews will be shared with each Principal Investigator, identified mentors, those who are authorized to make decisions about funding, and the IRB/IACUC as appropriate. Otherwise, these materials are considered confidential, including the names of the applicants, the titles of the proposals, and the opinions of individual reviewers.

It is the intent of the SRC that a proposal with one or more “major” weaknesses (that is, a NIH score of 7-9) should not receive IRB approval for human research involving more than minimal risk unless it is adequately revised, and that the IRB should balance the risks and benefits even for proposals scored better than 7. The SRC has not felt justified in recommending Mentored Research funding for proposals that have multiple “Moderate” deficiencies (that is, a NIH score worse than 6), but has been pleased to recommend funding for most of these proposals after they had been revised and resubmitted.

The SRC invites investigators who have submitted proposals, administrators responsible for distributing research funds, and regulatory committee members to provide us with constructive advice about our policies and procedures. We are eager to improve our methods, and hope that our efforts will be perceived as a fair and helpful part of the scientific process at MMC.