

March 17, 2008

Jeremy Berg, PhD
Lawrence Tabak, PhD
Keith Yamamoto, PhD
The Advisory Committee to the Director Working Group, and
The Steering Committee Working Group
The NIH 2007-2008 Peer Review Self-Study

Dear Colleagues,

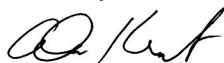
The Association for Psychological Science (APS) appreciates the invitation to comment on the Final Draft of the NIH 2007-2008 Peer Review Self-Study. The draft plan details many exciting proposals for peer review enhancement at NIH, and we support the need for revisions to the system.

NIH staff, during the internal consultation, recommended the use of psychometric analyses to help account for the human element in the practice of peer review. (p. 20) We were pleased to see the inclusion of psychometric research as the foundation for suggested changes to the rater reliability system (pp. 38-39), and hope that the NIH Director acts on these recommendations. This is exactly the kind of psychological science that can be of real value in enhancing the peer review system.

While we applaud the Steering and Advisory Groups' recognition of psychometric methods to address the critical rater reliability and scaling issues, we are concerned that NIH does not appear to be consulting with experts in decision- and judgment-making, an area of research that was often developed with NIH funding. In 2002, National Institute on Aging grantee Daniel Kahneman (Princeton) won a Nobel Prize for his work in this very field. Questions that this field can help answer include: How does uncertainty of outcome affect decision making? Are decisions systematically different in face-to-face peer review meetings vs. telephone meetings vs. virtual meetings? Does the number of people involved in a decision making process make a difference and what is the mechanism for this difference? Do systematic differences occur with a changing number of reviewers involved in the peer review process? Do variable numbers of ad hoc reviewers affect decisions? What about the number of reviews done by a committee? These and other questions require an expertise in judgment and decision making to answer (and even to correctly pose the questions). There is a substantial body of research knowledge that should be applied to these issues.

We strongly encourage you to draw on the relevant expertise in psychology and social and behavioral science as you contemplate changes in NIH's peer review system. We are more than happy to assist you in using research on judgment and decision making to ensure that peer review processes are based on sound science.

Sincerely,



Alan G. Kraut
Executive Director