

March 22, 2022

Noni Byrnes, Ph.D.  
Director, NIH Center for Scientific Review  
6701 Rockledge Drive  
Bethesda MD 20892-7768

Dear Dr. Byrnes,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Center for Scientific Review (CSR) Strategic Plan for 2022 – 2027. Founded in 1916, the Endocrine Society is the world's oldest, largest and most active organization devoted to research on hormones and the clinical practice of endocrinology. Our membership of over 18,000 includes basic and clinical researchers supported by grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and our members are proud to volunteer their time and expertise in the review of endocrine-relevant research grants. We enthusiastically support the goals of the draft plan and in particular the underlying principles of diversity and fairness, transparency in decision making, and communication with stakeholders. We offer several suggestions that, if adopted, will help ensure that CSR is able to accomplish the goals through implementation of the final strategic plan.

**Goal 1 - Maintain scientific review groups that provide appropriate scientific coverage and review settings for all of NIH science.**

Because endocrine research addresses the missions of multiple NIH Institutes and Centers, our members' grants are referred to numerous different study sections. While some study sections typically include strong expertise in endocrinology, our members report that some endocrine-related grants are referred to study sections that may not have sufficient endocrine expertise to assess the grant. For example, projects involving the role of nuclear receptors in cancer may be assigned to Tumor Cell Biology (TCB) or Molecular Oncogenesis (MONC), which may not have the same level of endocrine expertise relative to the Cell Signaling and Molecular Endocrinology (CSME) study section. Likewise, for study sections focused on neuroscience, endocrine expertise is important to ensure that individuals can evaluate the importance of cortisol and other hormones with effects on the brain. We are therefore very interested in the ENQUIRE process to evaluate study sections and as part of this process **we urge CSR to carefully evaluate the distribution of grants for endocrine research, especially for those basic science grants that are directed to study sections outside of the EMNR Review Group.** We would be happy to provide an analysis of our members' grants showing the distribution of assigned study sections to give CSR additional data for this activity. We also encourage CSR to provide feedback and guidance for new and experienced reviewers, especially in response to adjustments made as a result of the ENQUIRE process.

**Goal 2 - Further develop a large cadre of diverse, well-trained, and scientifically qualified experts to serve as reviewers.**

We applaud CSR for prioritizing the diversity of reviewers along multiple dimensions in objective 2.1. Because funding is a critical element of any scientist's career path, NIH review panels have a tremendous amount of influence over the retention of faculty, including underrepresented minority (URM) scientists and it is particularly important for diverse perspectives and viewpoints to be present on study sections and review panels. However, we note that rules and policies that govern participation in grant review activities may create unintentional barriers to achievement of the plan's goals. As we described in our response to the [NIH UNITE](#)



[Initiative RFI](#), URM faculty who have secured R01 funding at their institutions are often highly sought after for service activities and other campus activities to enhance diversity. While recognizing their importance, these service activities take time away from research and other career development activities, potentially resulting in diminished research productivity, challenges in applying for grants in the future, and ultimately loss of R01 funding. As part of the implementation plan for this objective, **we urge CSR to consider that the current rules which govern participation in important decision-making panels (e.g., requirement to have current R01 funding for NIH study section participation) are themselves barriers to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and test the effects of removing or modifying these rules. We also recommend that CSR assess the diversity of reviewers at all stages of the career pipeline, including the Early Career Reviewer program, to ensure that diverse candidates are full participants throughout CSR's programs and activities.**

The Endocrine Society sincerely appreciates the role of CSR in supporting the work done by our basic and clinical research communities and we hope that our recommendations are helpful as you develop the final strategic plan for the next 5 years. If we can be of any further assistance, please contact Joe Laakso, PhD, Director of Science Policy at [jlaakso@endocrine.org](mailto:jlaakso@endocrine.org).

Sincerely,

Carol H. Wysham, MD  
President, Endocrine Society