

April 6, 2017  
9:00 AM to 10:00 AM



Conference call # (888) 670-3525  
Conference code 5311418626

Biomedical Research Advisory Council  
**Meeting Minutes**

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**Board Members Present:**

Daniel Armstrong (Chair)  
Richard Nowakowski (Vice Chair)  
David Decker  
Allison Eng-Perez  
Stephen Gardell  
Susan Vadaparampil  
Barbara Centeno

**Board Members not in Attendance:**

Charles Evans Wood  
John Wingard  
Abubakr Bajwa

**Department of Health Staff:**

Bonnie Gaughan-Bailey, MPA, ASQ-CQIA, Administrator, Biomedical Research Section  
Teresa Mathew, MSW, MPA, Advisory Council Liaison, Biomedical Research Section  
Kaitlyn Barningham, MPH Candidate, Biomedical Research Zika Program Specialist

**Special Guests:**

Janet Kile, Senior Project Management Specialist, Oak Ridge Associated Universities (ORAU)  
Robert Angel, Section Manager, ORAU

A quorum was present. The meeting was called to order at 9:05 a.m. Board members received all pertinent meeting materials. Board members participated via conference call and could actively and equally participate in the discussion.

**I. Meeting Minute Approval**

Dr. Armstrong called for a vote on the prior meeting minutes. Dr. Decker made the motion to approve the March 7, 2017 minutes. Dr. Nowakowski seconded the motion. Total votes for approval: (Total members voting: 7) Affirmative: 7, Negative: 0, Recusal: 0

**II. Introductions and Meeting Overview**

Dr. Armstrong provided an overview of the meeting agenda. The main goal of the call was to make a final recommendation for a new peer review process to include peer review panels. This recommendation will inform the contract renewal with the peer review vendor. As mentioned in the March 7<sup>th</sup> conference call, the renewed contract must abide by the costs associated with the original contract. The Department needs the BRAC's input so that any changes to the process reflect the BRAC's wishes.

### **III. Discussion of Potential Peer Review Models**

The BRAC was provided with three peer review panel models developed by Janet Kile. Ms. Kile prepared a new model for the April 6<sup>th</sup> call and presented it to the BRAC. Dr. Armstrong also prepared a model following the restrictions of the original contract. The BRAC discussed the merits of each model and had the opportunity to ask Ms. Kile questions regarding the relative costs or feasibility of each model's components.

Dr. Armstrong suggested that one way to address the cost issue would be to instruct reviewers that they would receive \$500 per read, and that they would then participate in the panel review stage for no additional cost. Several members agreed that \$500 per read is a very generous honorarium for peer reviewers especially since they will not be required to travel for the panel stage of the process.

Members discussed the idea of limiting the number of applications received during a funding cycle by limiting the scope of the FOA. This would in turn limit the number of reviewers and panels needed during the review process, resulting in a lower cost to the Department. While lower costs would be appealing, this restriction on the scope of applications would not be popular among researchers. This idea did not gain traction with the BRAC.

Dr. Gardell asked for some clarification regarding the projected management cost for a contract that would include the type of peer review panel models examined during the call. Ms. Kile responded that although there would be an increase in management costs for the peer review panels, this increase would be offset by increased efficiencies in other areas.

Dr. Armstrong asked if a recent bill in the Senate relating to pediatric cancer research would result in additional funds for administrative costs. Bonnie Gaughan-Bailey replied that it is a possibility, but the Department will not know if this is the case until the end of the legislative session. Dr. Gardell asked if there was a cap on administrative funding from the state. Bonnie responded that the Department may spend up to 10% of the funds allocated to Bankhead-Coley and King for administrative costs. However, that does not negate the requirement to maintain the same prices listed in the original contract with ORAU.

In examining Dr. Armstrong's model, Dr. Nowakowski said that he thinks there should be some mechanism for eliminating proposals that are not relevant to the focus of each program, i.e. cancer-relatedness for Bankhead-Coley, or tobacco-relatedness for James and Esther King.

In instances where a proposal's initial scores have a high standard deviation, a fourth review is typically requested and the outlier score is thrown out. Dr. Decker asked what would happen if the fourth review is identical to one of the original scores. All four scores could be averaged. Dr. Vadapampil mentioned that the American Cancer Society allows all reviewers to have the opportunity to view each other's comments. This could give them the opportunity to think about the proposal in a new light and revise their scores if they so choose. Ms. Kile said that allowing initial reviewers to consider each other's scores is possible, but may add time and administrative costs to the review process. Dr. Nowakowski suggested that the low score simply be thrown out in instances where the two higher scores would have pushed the application into the panel review phase. If the two higher scores were not high enough to put the application into the panel review, then the proposal would not advance further.

The discussion turned toward the percent of proposals that would need to be reviewed at the panel level. If Bankhead-Coley and King continue to only fund around 8% of submissions, then the panel review stage might not need to include quite such a large percentage of the

submissions. Assuming roughly the same number of submissions for future funding cycles, advancing 40% of submissions to the panel review phase would mean reviewing roughly 80 proposals at the panel level.

Advancing a smaller percentage to the panel level would in turn limit how many panels would be needed. If the proposals were separated into panels by type of research (i.e. clinical research, discovery science, etc.) it might alleviate some of the scoring/review discrepancy that we see among mechanisms. Dr. Armstrong suggested advancing the top 30% of applications to the panel stage, and four panels with subject areas to be determined by the BRAC on a yearly basis depending on the variety of applications received.

Applicants would receive comments collected during the individual review and the panel review stage (if applicable). Comments would be collected through PeerNet. Dr. Nowakowski suggested that the applicant receive the standard deviation as well as the mean scores.

Dr. Armstrong called for a vote for the current contract with ORAU to be amended to include the following:

- Reviewers would receive the same \$500 per read honorarium that they currently receive, but would be required to participate in the panel review process in addition to their duties as individual reviewers.
- The model Dr. Armstrong proposed would be adopted with revisions.
- The BRAC will determine how issues related to scientific quality and topic-relatedness will be considered in the review process.
- The top 30% of proposals from the individual review phase will advance to the panel review phase.
- If there are two initial review scores that would place the proposal in the top 30% of proposals, and one score that would place it below the top 30%, then the proposal would be advanced to the panel review stage.
- Panels would be created for review with 9 to 15 members. The number of panels and subject areas of the panels to be determined by the BRAC on a year by year basis.
- ORAU will provide review scores and comment reports to be distributed to unfunded applicants by the Department.

Dr. Nowakowski made the motion to adopt this peer review model. Dr. Decker seconded the motion. Total votes for approval: (Total members voting: 7) Affirmative: 7, Negative: 0, Recusal: 0

#### **IV. Brief Discussion of \$250,000 in Administrative Funds Available for one Bankhead-Coley and One James and Esther King Grant**

There is a total of \$250,000 in administrative funds available to fund one Bankhead-Coley grant and one James and Esther King grant. These funds will need to be encumbered in grants before the end of the fiscal year (June 30, 2017). Because this would amount to \$125,000 per grant, it would make the most sense to

#### **V. Public Comment**

None.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:10 a.m.