

VMLRP External Peer Review

Roles of Reviewer 1, 2, and 3

Please read this entire document carefully before beginning evaluations.

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Introduction

The *Veterinary Medicine Loan Repayment Program* (VMLRP) staff at NIFA welcome you to panel service for the VMLRP. The contents of this document will help you understand your responsibilities as an external peer review panelist for NIFA, and the pre-panel criteria you should use when rating the applications you are assigned.

Computers and Files

While you are in Kansas City, Missouri, NIFA may provide you with an internet-connected laptop computer preloaded with all applications and review templates for use during regular business hours. However, you are encouraged to bring your own laptop computer should you want to work on review revisions at your hotel or elsewhere, outside of business hours. Please be certain also to **bring your completed draft reviews** with you to Kansas City as Microsoft Word files **saved to a flash drive or some other form of portable media/storage.**

Reviewer Roles

You are designated as Primary Reviewer, Secondary Reviewer, and Tertiary Reviewer for each application assigned to you (see ‘Assignments’), thus there are 3 reviewers per application. While you are only required to read and review the applications assigned to you, you may read

and review any of the applications assigned to your panel. During the opportunity for general panel discussion, which is offered for each application, you may contribute your observations and opinions concerning any application for which you do not have a conflict of interest (COI; see COI guidance attachment). You will only be asked to leave the room (and thus have no participation in a review or ranking) if you have a COI with an application. Otherwise you will participate in the review of every application to which you are specifically assigned and, as mentioned above, any other application you choose to comment on. **However, remember that you are only directly responsible for the applications you are assigned to as primary, secondary, or tertiary on the reviewer assignment sheet.**

Individual Reviews

Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Reviewers prepare **Individual Written Reviews** using the attached “Evaluation Template VMLRP Individual Written Review” form. Since applications do not have an assigned reader, we ask that you be prepared for 2-3 late additions to your assigned proposals due to COIs or other unforeseen circumstances.

It is not your role as reviewer to attempt to make an assessment of the potential of a specific shortage area to support a veterinarian financially. As tempting as it is to do so, it is this program’s experience that absent a comprehensive market analysis of an area (never available to the panel) the panel is not in a position to deem an area “unfillable”, by the right veterinarian. Beyond sketchy-at-best presumptions the panel may have about financial challenges that may exist in some areas more than others, these unknowns can become meaningless if the right person comes along with the desire and where-with-all (personal financial and family situation, entrepreneurial savvy, innovative business plan, etc) to be a good fit for a particular shortage that few if any other vets would be prepared to fill. The program has cases of this happening and it is a strength of the VMLRP’s that it can facilitate the wedding of motivated, outstanding veterinarians with, in many cases, challenging practice situations that the applicant is uniquely positioned and genuinely anxious to do his/her best to serve.

Renewal Applications

NIFA began reviewing *renewal* applications in the 2014 program cycle. For 2020, participants who received their first award in 2016 or 2017 may apply for a competitive renewal of their loan repayment award as long as they have sufficient remaining eligible debt (minimum of \$15,000) to apply. Note that these applicants’ shortage codes will be different in that the first two numbers in the code will be 16 and 17 (instead of 20) and this will require that you either filter the shortage map by a different year or for 2020 go to the files provided to find and view the corresponding shortage description. Renewal applicants should be reviewed and rated by the same standards applied to all other 2020 applicants. Because a goal of the program is to recruit vets into shortages situations with the hope that they might set down roots and continue to serve the area, renewal applicants are perhaps more likely to represent program success; by signing up for another ‘hitch’ in the program, the chances of sustaining a longer-term veterinary presence in the area greatly improves. Even if the person ultimately moves away, value of veterinary services and a clientele base (‘blue sky’) have been better established making it easier for the next veterinarian who may consider continuing or establishing a practice serving that area.

Pre-Panel Draft Rating Categories

The in-panel rating system shifts slightly for reasons to be explained on the first in-person panel day.

- Outstanding
- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

In order to help you categorize each of your assigned applications, **please generally try to follow the guidelines provided below, though you are not limited to these parameters.** These definitions are meant to assist you in determining the tentative and final rating for each of your assigned applications and help encourage consistency between reviewers.

Outstanding

- Merit of match of applicant with shortage service needs is very strong
- Applicant qualification are exceptional
- The proposed service is critical to US animal agriculture, food safety or public health and fits this program's priorities
- Feasibility and logistics of proposed veterinary service are very clearly described
- No major flaws or problems with longer-term veterinary service plan
- Likelihood of achieving professional success and satisfaction is very high

Excellent

- Merit of match of applicant with shortage service needs is generally strong
- Applicant is well qualified
- The proposed service is important to US animal agriculture, food safety or public health and fits this program's priorities
- Feasibility and logistics of proposed veterinary service are clearly described
- No major flaws or problems with longer-term veterinary service plans
- Likelihood of achieving professional success and satisfaction is high

Good

Any combination of the following:

- Merit of match of applicant with shortage service needs is adequate
- Applicant is moderately qualified
- The proposed service is somewhat important to US animal agriculture, food safety or public health, and loosely fits this program's priorities
- Feasibility and logistics of proposed veterinary service are described satisfactorily
- Some concerns may exist about the longer-term veterinary service plan
- Likelihood of achieving professional success and satisfaction is moderate

Fair

Any combination of the following:

- Merit of match of applicant with shortage service needs is not very compelling
- Applicant lacks some qualifications
- Importance to US animal agriculture, food safety or public health of the proposed service is modest; fits this program's priorities less convincingly
- Feasibility and logistics of proposed veterinary service are questionable
- Concerns about the longer-term veterinary service plan exist
- Likelihood of achieving professional success and satisfaction is debatable

Poor/Do Not Fund

Any combination of the following:

- Merit of match of applicant with shortage service needs is low
- Applicant lacks important qualifications
- The importance to US animal agriculture, food safety or public health of the proposed service is unclear; poorly fits this program's priorities
- Feasibility and logistics of proposed veterinary service are highly questionable
- Serious concerns about the longer-term veterinary service plan exist
- Likelihood of achieving professional success and satisfaction is low

Before Panel

Remember! Email your draft 'Individual Written Reviews' and excel sheet with initial category (rank) to vmrlp.applications@usda.gov by the pre-panel date, indicated in the email. ALSO, bring your draft Individual Written Reviews on a USB flash drive or other portable media. Please bring your draft reviews with you (especially if you revised them since sending them to NIFA) saved to a flash drive or other portable media/device. As back-up to this flash drive, you may wish to store your draft reviews on a personal laptop or tablet you bring with you. It is critical that you have your most recent draft written reviews with you as they will guide your oral commentary, and they will be what you edit (if necessary) in response to what you hear during panel discussions.

Panel Discussion

During panel discussion of each application, the Tertiary Reviewer serves as scribe and lead author of the "*Panel Summary*" (see separate "*Panel Summary*" form). One Panel Summary is prepared for every application. The Tertiary Reviewer is also responsible for preparing an "*Individual Written Review*" (see Tertiary Reviewer guidance below).

In addition to the above, primary, secondary, and tertiary reviewers perform as follows:

1. **Primary Reviewer:** The Primary Reviewer begins each application review process by providing an approximately 1 minute synopsis of the application/applicant essential information (who, what, why, where, how). The Primary Reviewer then presents his/her review comments concerning the strengths and weaknesses of application, and proposes a tentative initial rating that will be indicated on a display in the panel session room. After all other assigned reviewers have provided their strength/weakness comments and proposed

ratings (also shown on display), the Primary Reviewer leads discussion open to the entire panel. That discussion should end with a penultimate final rating for the application ('ultimate' ratings are determined on the final day). In the event consensus is not achieved, the Primary Reviewer selects the penultimate final rating.

2. **Secondary Reviewer:** states any additional (non-repetitive) observations and comments. The secondary reviewer concludes by indicating his/her tentative rating.
3. **Tertiary Reviewer:** makes any additional observations and comments and indicates his/her tentative rating. **Additionally**, the Tertiary Reviewer is responsible for taking thorough notes of the discussion of the application (capturing key strength and weakness commentary by, and conclusions of, the three assigned reviewers as well as any other panel members who contributed to the discussion). These notes will be used by the Tertiary Reviewer to generate a "**Panel Summary.**" The **Panel Summary** (written on the form provided under separate cover) provides feedback to the Applicant regarding the overall panel assessment. This feedback includes: 1) positive aspects of the application; 2) negative aspects of the application; and 3) synthesis comment(s) with strengthening suggestions and 4) the final overall panel rating for the application. After it is drafted by the Tertiary Reviewer, the "Panel Summary", is circulated for editing and approval (by signature) by the other panelists assigned to write a review for that application (i.e., the Primary and Secondary Reviewers). This is done before final departure from NIFA on the last day.

Penultimate and Final Ratings/Rankings

Final ratings, as well as final serial rankings, are decided on the last day the panel meets. During the final-day/final-rating process, any panelist may reopen discussion of any application to make a case for re-rating. Panelists making such an appeal should be prepared on the last day to make a cogent case for the re-rating/ranking they propose. Assigned panelists are again asked to try to achieve consensus based on information provided in the appeal and ensuing discussion. If consensus is achieved, that rating becomes final. Absent consensus on appeal, the original Primary Reviewer assigns the final rating.

Completing the Process

You may edit your draft 'Individual Written Reviews' prior to submission of your final versions when the panel adjourns on the last day of the panel. This includes the option to revise your ratings of applications that may be appropriate after more fully considering the strengths and weaknesses brought to light during panel deliberations. The final version of your Individual Written Reviews and the Panel Summaries you are responsible for as Tertiary Reviewer must be submitted to NIFA staff in electronic form before you leave on the last day the panel meets.

Questions?

If you have any questions or need clarification on your role as a panelist, or other VMLRP-related information, contact vmlrp.applications@usda.gov.