

## INTRODUCTION FOR CCJJ GRANT REVIEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

This paper is intended to serve as an orientation to the CCJJ grant review process. Although the criteria for assessing proposals will differ among grants, all good grant proposals have common traits. This paper demonstrates how to review and evaluate a “typical” grant proposal. The specific criteria for your grant competition will be provided to you in the form of a scoring rubric (score sheet). To understand the role of the reviewer, it might be helpful to look at the entire grant process.

When grant competitions are announced, the Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice (CCJJ) distributes a Request for Proposal (RFP). An RFP is a document stating the terms of the grant award. Information contained in an RFP includes: the kinds of projects the awards will fund, the information to be included in the proposal, guidelines for writing the proposal, the deadline for proposal submissions, and other relevant information. Upon receiving the RFP, applicants begin the process of constructing their project to CCJJ’s requirements. The best projects begin before a competition is announced. A prepared applicant will research a problem, set goals, and determine a course of action long before a funder is identified.

### The Review Process

The review process begins with selecting the reviewers. Typically, reviewers are chosen from a variety of backgrounds to ensure a broad perspective. To ensure that all proposals receive consistent, reliable scores and helpful, well considered comments, reviewers are assigned to teams. CCJJ grant review teams are composed of a well-balanced mix of at least three people with a variety of backgrounds and expertise. All review committee members are assigned the same proposals to review, allowing them to consult with one another. Reviewers should:

- Receive your grants, scoring rubrics and any other relevant documents from CCJJ.
- Read and sign the Conflict-of-Interest Statement (Not Applicable).
- Familiarize yourself with the RFP.
- Read the scoring rubric and familiarize yourself with the review criteria.
- Read the proposals.
- Provide helpful comments.
- Award points.
- Reconvene with your team to review your comments and adjust your scores accordingly (if necessary).
- Return all essential documents to CCJJ.

### Suggestions on How to Read a Proposal

- Schedule a reasonable amount of your time to read and critique each proposal.
- Familiarize yourself with the review criteria, RFP requirements and priorities.
- Read quickly through the grant proposal once before completing the scoring rubric. Then return to do a more thorough second review and scoring. This gives you a chance to absorb what is presented.
- As you read through the project narrative, put a “\$” next to anything that might cost money. This will help you later on when you try to match the project narrative to the budget.

- Highlight sections that address the RFP requirements or priorities.
- Discuss your thoughts with your review team. Different perspectives help you see a grant proposal's strengths and weaknesses.

**Some hints from experienced reviewers:**

1. Do not read into the grant proposal your own biases. Be aware of any personal bias and do not let it influence your appraisal of the application.
2. Be alert to making assumptions about missing background information or project meaning. Review only what is written in the proposal.
3. Deal only with the proposal at hand. Past experiences with the applicant are not germane to the proposal you are reading today.
4. Read for substance, not style.

**Suggestions on How to Critique and Score a Proposal**

- When making your comments, be as specific as possible. Remember that applicants may read your comments to improve their proposal writing skills. Refrain from using subjective words such as "bad" or "good."
- For clarity, reference specific parts of the proposal. Quote the proposal if necessary. The person reading your comments may not be familiar with the details of the proposal.
- Write neatly. People will be reading what you write.
- Try to phrase everything as a statement. Questions aren't wrong, but statements are less ambiguous than questions.
- Award points after making comments.
- Do not exceed the maximum score allowed for each section.
- Score using whole numbers.
- It is imperative that you justify low scores with comments that clearly explain your reasoning.
- Note specific strengths and weaknesses in the comments section of the scoring rubric.
- Save the top scores for proposals that surpass the standards set by the RFP.
- Read grant applications and score them using the information presented in the scoring rubric and your professional judgment.
- Without question, reviewers' comments are the most important aspect of the review process. They will provide guidance to CCJJ in making final funding decisions. Reviewer comments provide constructive feedback to applicants.